THE Freeman

IDEAS ON LIBERTY

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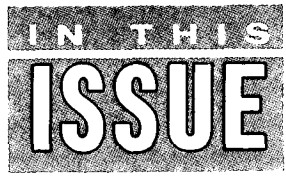

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THE Freeman

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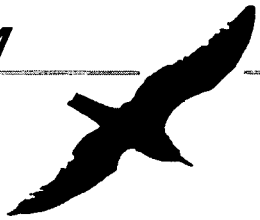
FREEDOM



A BIOLOGICAL NECESSITY

HAROLD B. ELSOM

WE FREQUENTLY HEAR the declaration that much of the contemporary political arrangement contravenes human nature. This is, perhaps, but another way of saying that legal, economic, and social relationships must conform to biologically vital principles if they are to endure to the benefit of the human species. The concept includes the idea that liberty of the individual is one of those vital prerequisites. Is there any validity to these thoughts?

We may begin with an old thought, both broad and deep: liberty and growth are aspects of the same thing. Freedom begins with life – any life, anywhere, any time, under any conditions. We may say of matter that it is bound by the law of inertia; if at rest it will remain so or, if in motion, it will continue in the same direction at the same rate until acted upon by an external force. Not so life. Here internal phenomena act upon external matter. The tiniest seed cracks crusted soil. Vine and trunk topple ancient stone. Life uses physical energies to achieve hidden ends, sometimes opposing one to the other, sometimes transforming them, but always recasting environment nearer to its own desire. Life began and continues as

Mr. Elsom, an investment officer of a bank, finds time for free-lance exploration and explanation of the libertarian point of view.

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an intervention into the material order, an intrusion of choice and desire into the fixity of material cause and effect.

Life was expansive and purposive from the beginning; it had irritability. It could react to healthful or toxic environment. It could pulsate or wiggle. It could aggregate with other cells to arrive at multicellular life. It could protrude pseudo limbs, develop sensitive special organs. It demanded motility and awareness. Instead of resting in the brine, it began to swim. It crawled out of the water to penetrate swamp, forest, and desert. It leaped into the air for flight. It developed uniform blood temperature, fur, and feathers to increase its independence of weather. It stood upright, enlarged its brain, formed hands to enter a world similar to the one we know today. Always the facts were the same – an enlargement of freedom and choice and, with the higher specimens at least, some provision for frivolity, vacillation, and the deeper thing called enjoyment.

In the beginning, then, we have a blob of protoplasm fixed by physical law. Now the blob has become an organism straining toward the stars. Yet during every instant life has been vulnerable and soft as compared with the crushing inflexibility of the material order. Logically, the advent of life is impossible. No mathematical progression or probability can account for it. Science, philosophy, and religion comment on its development and what it means, if anything. Whatever they say, it remains as a fact that the consistent direction of life has been toward a wider range of movement, increasing awareness of itself and its surroundings, purposive discipline of itself and the externals of matter and force. Put together, what are these things but freedom? Life force, choice, freedom – these are single, one and the same.

Variety, Order, and Progress

But life and freedom are not, of themselves, good or bad. A streptococcus vents its virulence on saint and sinner alike. Throughout geologic time life's forms fed on each other, each free according to its own nature and its own strength. Variety, order, and progress were maintained by a self-adjusting ecology, so that the regular round of feeding, reproducing, fighting, and enjoyment went on without hazard to the species except for the providential requirements of succession and development. Tyrannosaurus Rex lumbered through the cretaceous period as no more nor less than a massive saurian until the

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evolutionary calendar marked the time for him to give place to more sharply tuned nervous systems and less ponderous bodies. The built-in restraints of fear, weariness, satiation, vacillation; the interdependence of plant and animal, climatic and geographic limitations, all these imposed balance to the basic propensity toward freedom and expansion.

Man began with the same animal urges. He, however, was endowed with new organs: the hand, the more complex brain, and sensory apparatus. So equipped, he embodied a new potential. He could outmaneuver, outsmart any other life form on earth. Heretofore, plants and animals had to evolve organs of subsistence over eons of time. Man could fashion *things* outside his own body such as cudgels, spears, fist axes and, lately, atom bombs. He could augment his senses with cunning devices. Very early he learned that he could put other life — animal, vegetable, and human — to his own uses. This ability of individuals or small groups of men to impose their volition upon others was the most ominous potential of all, since it meant that man could multiply his powers not only through instrumentation, but also through consumption of the bodies, minds, and spirits of other men. Ecological balance was now violated. A species could destroy itself.

Man's Power To Enslave

Man's ability to dominate and enslave, a new power, was fed by subman emotional drives. These his refined brain and his more complex awareness converted into lusts for things quite beyond his needs: the lust for possessions and the lust for power or recognition. Out of these propensities, perhaps, government was born. The mightiest assumed leadership of the tribe, the tribe plundered its neighbors. Growing knowledge but led to more conquests. Military prowess, superstition, bribery, deceit, threats, these were the routines of conquest and administration. Entire peoples became chattels as did the Hebrews under Egyptian rule.

Thus, the natural life urge toward freedom, newly empowered and freed of the old ecological restraints, remained wild, primitive. So long as life had been inner directed and balanced by ecology, it was self-realizing. Creatures tended to be whatever they were to the fullest. The upward surge moved on. But with the advent of external rule or government, the larger portion of mankind found its inner or spiritual being, the seat of freedom and the life force, more and more

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constricted and destroyed. Unless something new were added, man had entered a *cul-de-sac*. He needed a substitute for the older balances and restraints of Nature.

Self-Discipline

At some point in the millenniums preceding the Christian era, suggestions of such a substitute began to appear – a new sort of inner direction. Inklings come to us from prehistory. Some part of it took the form of custom or tradition. Occasionally, an individual chieftain found himself actuated by vague and passing desire for the good or pleasure of others. In ancient Greece there appeared new kinds of men, philosophers, theologians, who tried to see life whole, whose insights told them that new qualities like wisdom, and moral and emotional discipline were necessary for a satisfying existence. Life would be most rewarding when ordered and reasoned under the auspices of form, goodness, and restraint.

Somewhere between 1500 and 1300 B.C. the evils and superstitions of primitive religion were surpassed. Ikhnaton, an Egyptian pharaoh, in some unknown manner, lost himself in a vision of the One God whose principle was goodness, and who required virtue of men.

With the Hebrew lawgivers and prophets the one God found a tongue. These men observed most acutely the destructive carryovers from primitive men and called them sin. They insisted that men should recognize and obey the new inner direction (the One God) or perish. To protect the human potential, the Decalogue was given, a body of basically negative law designed to protect the newly mutated minority of the species.

Here then, somewhere in prehistory and early history, began an evolutionary cleavage between the mass of men whose intellectual and physical capacities were still motivated by primitive emotional drives, and the microscopic proportion of mutants who had acquired consciousness of God as the directive force of life. Everything hung upon a different order of volition and consciousness.

For the latter, the mutant element, those who could see and feel the wakening spirit, Christ carried the development further by substituting love or good will for hate, the Golden Rule for the debit and credit system of human relations, and redemption out of sin and punishment. Above all, he made man aware of God, lifted him from pawn to son-ship, stressed that man could communicate with God and God with man. God had purposes which were beyond sense and reason; therefore,

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man should confidently accept God's lead without fear. Doing so, he would have life more abundantly; he could become a new creature — something more than man had been. But to do so, he must slough the old animal tensions. Otherwise, they would enslave and kill the life urge to freedom. If he were incapable of taking the new step, he would join Tyrannosaurus Rex and the saber-toothed tiger. The wages of sin would be death.

On the Useful Scope of Government

Seen against this panorama of evolution and history, what is the useful scope of government, then? Should it determine man's purposes, that is, what his social and economic objectives are, and see to it that he achieves them? Is it proper for it to take a great part of his wage by force to spend for these objectives? Is it proper for the state to attempt to determine what man should be; that is, to dominate the communications media and the educative process? Should it take John Doe's earnings and give them to Richard Roe? Are men to be leveled and equated economically, politically, and socially? Some men lack the sensory apparatus to perceive the immorality of these things. In their eyes such meddling is no more than a "positive approach." As a real clincher, they ask the question, What is it that you wish to conserve? implying that only selfishness and perversity impede the achievement of their drafting board utopias.

The conservative can very well answer, Life. If any pattern is clear from the evolutionary and historical processes, it is this: volition, consciousness, and spirit are the objects of the struggle. Life assaults limitations through the individual *will*. Fin, leg, wing, wagon, automobile, rocket; fur, uniform blood temperature, clothes, space suit — all steps toward greater choice of place, more independence of environment. Sensitive cells become eyes and ears, rulers, microscopes, telescopes, radar, and oscilloscope, all pressing against the outer limits of awareness. In the realm of morals and the spirit we observe first fang, claw, hunter and prey ascending to murder, cruelty, ignorance, rapine, superstition, hate, slavery, obligatory vengeance, reverence for the dead and the unknown, knowledge, morals, mercy, justice, generosity, art, religion, and love.

Each new attribute arrived packaged in an individual — a mutant minority of one, inner directed, and entrusted with the future of the species. This is what the conservative knows, either

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consciously or in his bones. He knows that new attributes and true progress come from the deep, not from the state. He knows that the brain evolved to serve the will and the conscience. It is to be viewed as an organ, not a superior replacement for God. Man himself is more than brain. In the more than 1,000 million years of life on earth no step in the upward trek was intellectually engendered, not even with the brainiest specimen of the lot, homo sapiens. The inner drive toward freedom, awareness, and conscience accomplished these things — whipped the mind when it was weary, controlled the legs that would run away, fought the pain that spelled surrender, ignored logical doubts that meant defeat.

It is not likely that the professional liberal, through theoretical draftsmanship in economics and sociology, will ever be able to reorder our inner selves. His methods and his ends are contrary to the providential direction of life, since it is by multiplicity and mutation that life progresses; man was not intended to be, nor ever can be, homogenized. Further, the liberal disdains and opposes himself to the latest and best evolutionary gifts: the moral and spiritual attributes. Moral man cannot take another's property without his consent and without exchange of value. Moral man cannot utilize the covetousness, greed, envy, and aggressiveness of the many to overpower the few. Moral man cannot resort to positive law to diminish and inhibit the life-urge to freedom, to substitute the amoral social conscience for that of the real, pulsing, individual human.

Government's Limited Role

With this background we can define the beneficial scope of government in more fundamental terms. True liberty lies in recognizing that each man's vital force is his own, that it may not be impinged upon by any other man or any government. His volition, his awareness, his conscience are areas of personality where the individual must fight his own battles, where he becomes master through discipline or slave to primitive impulse. It follows that the whole chore of government is to protect the human personality, not to control it or to coerce it against its nature, to protect it from all sources of physical violence, to insure the execution of serious agreements, to adjudicate wrongs, and to provide a mechanism for its own limitation. Men may yet generate profound, hitherto unknown, enjoyments and satisfactions. If they do, they will do so in and of themselves, under

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the protection of government conceived and administered in harmony with biological and spiritual requirements.

The conservative desires to preserve the possibilities and the enjoyments of life. Volition, choice, awareness, conscience — these are the sweetest, most promising attributes the conservative knows. If their promise is to be fulfilled, government must be protective and subservient to them. Expansion of government beyond these limits literally renders the life stream noxious and unhealthy. ◈

IDEAS ON LIBERTY

Laws Follow Beliefs

THE CONSTITUTION of the United States worked well until 1860 because most of the voters were in favor of the principles on which it was based. For the next eight years there was no effective Constitution; it was temporarily shelved while the issue of slavery was settled by force of arms. Not surprisingly, the victors then wrote their own philosophy into the Constitution.

The Constitution continued to work reasonably well from 1868 to 1930 because most of the voters were still generally inclined toward most of the principles that inspired it.

The Constitution hasn't worked at all well since 1930 because most of the voters have not been in favor of the social and economic and political systems it was designed to support. Words have little meaning when the spirit behind them is missing.

The government of the United States (or of France or Russia or any other nation over a significant period of time) will be and do whatever most of the voters want or will tolerate. No mechanistic scheme or written document can ever for long prevent the effective minority (usually called the majority) of the people from doing whatever it is they want to do.

Thus, whenever the majority (that is, the effective minority) of the American people accept again the general philosophy that inspired the Constitution, we will return to the Constitution; not before. For while laws may reflect what people believe, it is the beliefs, *not* the laws as such, that generally determine their actions.

DEAN RUSSELL

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THE HIGH COST OF HIGH TAX RATES

IN A POPULAR NOVEL of a decade ago, *Executive Suite*, the two most unattractive characters were both experts at figuring the "tax angle" in any business situation. By portraying them so unsympathetically, the book reflected the impatience which the public has come to feel, not so much toward the "tax expert" as toward the taxing system that by the enormity of its appetite and the complexity of its workings has created a place, indeed a need, for him.

Taxes in the United States – especially the high rates of federal income tax on corporations and on individuals of middle or higher income levels – have distorted business practice, twisted incentive into strange shapes where they have not killed it completely, and diverted brain-hours beyond tally into the fascinating but economically sterile art of avoidance. (Avoidance is not to be confused with evasion, the term applied by the authorities to the nonpayment of taxes actually due.)

It is only logical for individuals and companies to plan their activities so as to avoid taxes by all available lawful means, just as a traveler lays out his route to avoid torn-up roads and traffic bottlenecks. There is no case – moral, legal, or otherwise – against tax avoidance. There is a strong case, both in economics and in national interest, against a structure of taxes so punitive in some of its effects that taxpayers feel it more desirable to minimize taxes than to maximize earnings. At that point, the nation's methods of raising revenue are well into the area of diminishing returns. The tax dollar saved – valuable as it is to the individual or company – is not a dollar earned so far as the total growth of the economy is concerned.

Taxmanship, a term sometimes applied to avoidance in its more intricate forms, might be called the active response to today's

From *The Morgan Guaranty Survey*, November 1962.

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crushing tax burdens. It involves waste and irrationalities that may be as great a drag on growth as is the passive response of avoiding taxes by choosing not to earn to full capacity. The toll in manpower alone is impressive. The number of full-time tax specialists in the U. S. is estimated to be near 100,000 – mostly lawyers and accountants. This figure does not include the thousands of employees and executives of business firms who devote all or part of their working time to tax matters. Since government must have revenues, and compliance with tax laws of any kind will involve bookkeeping and other administration, some drain of human resources in the process is inevitable. But the degree to which present taxation forces the defensive deployment of time and talent represents a deplorable waste.

Before and After

One business commentator has remarked that the tax collector sits in invisible attendance at every meeting of a corporation's board of directors. He had in mind the preoccupation with tax consequences that dominates so many business decisions. Illustrative is the prevalent concept of two kinds of dollar – before-tax and after-tax. To this type of thinking, minor savings in costs may not seem worth the pain and effort when it is pointed out that they are well worth only 48 cents of the dollar. Conversely, expenditures look much less formidable when it is recalled that 52 per cent of the amount would be taken by federal income tax if the company decided against the expense.

The habit of half-price thinking has colored the whole conduct of business. True, the results have not been entirely unwholesome. Corporate philanthropy, which if properly administered, benefits society and ultimately the company itself as well, unquestionably has received a stimulus from the steep level of the corporate income tax rate (contributions that meet Internal Revenue Service requirements are deductible). In fact, the whole structure of gift-supported activities in welfare, education, and related fields has become so related to the high tax rates on corporate and upper-bracket personal income that some agencies dependent on voluntary donations are studying ways to meet the fund-raising problems that a meaningful reduction in rates might pose.

Other manifestations of the after-tax approach to the corporate dollar are less appealing. It is possible to conjecture, for example, that postwar cost increases in the U. S. would have been less

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sharp – and the present competitive position of American products in world markets consequently stronger – if industry's wage negotiators and salary administrators had not been operating in the knowledge that about half the cost of increases granted would go to taxes if it didn't go to payroll expense.

The Problems of Raising Pay

In the upper salary ranges, where personal income tax rates approach the point of total takeover, the problem of how to award a raise when deserved has led corporations into the paths of innovation that are valid in intention but in practice have proved subject to abuse. Among devices adopted are employment contracts providing for deferred compensation, usually to be paid after the individual has ended active work with the company, and plans by which specified individuals receive options to buy company stock over some future period at a price set in advance. The first method spreads income over a longer period and thus usually makes it taxable at somewhat lower rates. The second can produce capital gains, taxable at lower rates than ordinary income, if the stock is bought and then sold after the required waiting period at a price higher than was paid for it. Both are legitimate devices, but excesses in their use have drawn wide criticism.

In an effort to shield compensation from the bite of high tax rates, some companies have been liberal in their policies toward business expenses, letting selected personnel enjoy unusual perquisites in the course – or, sometimes, merely in the name – of furthering the interests of the enterprise. In its crudest form, this is usually known as "the old expense account dodge." Aside from outright cases of "padding," the effectiveness of this means of tax avoidance is pretty well limited to the "psychic" income an individual may derive from a certain amount of gracious living at company expense. Yet, in the aggregate, the corporate extravagance resulting from it may be considerable.

Beyond the dollars and cents, enormous harm has been done to business by the colorful mythology that has grown up around practices designed to help the individual avoid losing the greater part of his pay to taxes. Externally, the exaggerated impression of rampant abuse has damaged public respect for, and confidence in, business. Internally, it has chipped away here and there at business morale and business ethics.

What is overlooked in the glib

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flood of moralizing preachments induced by all this is the one central fact: a tax philosophy that seeks to level incomes has driven business to seek whatever means it can find within the law to stimulate the thing it must have — a high level of excellence in individual performance. Human nature being what it is, material rewards are the way to get such a performance. The tax structure being what it is, resort to devices of avoidance is inevitable.

Corporate financial practice is tailored to tax considerations in important ways. With earnings taxed at 52 per cent, and interest on debt deductible as a business expense while dividends must be paid from after-tax income, there is an immense predisposition to finance by debt rather than by the issue of new equity. Even in 1961, when price-earnings ratios of common stocks were at or near all-time highs, and dividend yields were below bond yields in many cases, corporations raised only $3.7 billion by stock issues and $9.4 billion by bond and note flotations.

In its ultimate exaggeration — and extreme tax rates breed extremes of avoidance — the corporate propensity for borrowing in preference to other means of raising capital is expressed in the so-called "thin" incorporation. The owners put up capital principally in the form of loans to the business rather than purchases of stock. The interest, provided certain tests are met, is a deductible expense to the business; it is, of course, taxable income to the lender, but it comes out of the corporation free of the profits tax that would apply to earnings from which dividends would be paid. The avoidance is perfectly lawful and, in terms of tax law, eminently sensible. In terms of business practice, it may or may not be sound, depending on specific circumstances; the dangerous thing is that, by penalizing equity as it does, the tax structure may hopelessly blur judgments as to proper balance among the sources of capital in a soundly based enterprise.

Meanwhile, the steeply progressive tax rates on personal income, by taking the luster off dividend payments for some stockholders, have influenced some companies to retain a larger proportion of earnings than would otherwise be held in the business — and larger indeed than some income-conscious stockholders might like to see retained.

Penalty for Staying in Business

In combination, the high rates of corporate, personal, and estate taxes have the effect of creating an all but irresistible "death wish" in the successful small, closely

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held company. The owner of such a company is likely to have as his principal concern, not how he can expand and insure the continuity of the venture, but rather how he can most advantageously sell it out, liquidate it, or cut down his share of ownership — all in defense against potentially confiscatory taxes.

If the enterprise represents — as is likely — the bulk of the owner's total means, he faces the prospect that on his death the business will have to be sold to pay the estate tax, which can be as high as 77 per cent. Since a sale forced by such circumstances might have to be made well below a fair price, the owner is inclined to anticipate the event and put the company up for acquisition. He is further encouraged in this by the prospect of exchanging the operating profits of future years — taxable at the high rates applicable to ordinary income — for a present capital gain in the form of cash or stock received from the sell-out, taxable at a lower rate and in the case of stock perhaps not taxable at all until ultimately turned into cash.

For Tax Purposes, It Sometimes Pays To Lose

This tendency of the tax laws to impel the liquidation of small companies, or their consolidation into larger ones, is especially ironic in view of the declared national policy of assisting small business. But tax considerations can also push larger companies into mergers or acquisitions that have little other advantage to recommend them. Any company that has experienced losses and will not be able to offset the full amount of them against profits within the allowed carry-back and carry-forward periods may be worth more to some other company than it is to its owners (a sort of "How to Make Money without Really Succeeding").

Corporate trafficking in losses has been diminished in recent years by changes in the tax law, and classified advertisements seeking out losers are hardly ever seen in financial journals any more. Under certain circumstances, however, the present high tax rate on corporate income can still make a deficit seem to be worth real money — and, for tax purposes, actually so to be.

A windfall effect of the steepness of income tax rates, particularly those on upper levels of personal income has benefited states, municipalities, and other public entities able to issue debt securities bearing interest exempt from federal income taxes. The higher taxes are, the more the exemption is worth — to lender and borrower

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alike. For an individual whose income is taxed at a rate well above 50 per cent, say, the prospect of return on a business investment involving appreciable risk must be juicy indeed to match the attractiveness of a tax-free bond issued by a state or municipality with a strong credit rating. As a result, such borrowers have been able to get money cheaper than even the federal government. Average yields on U. S. Treasury bonds currently are almost a full percentage point, and those on top-grade corporate bonds about 1¼ points, above those on municipal obligations.

The borrower's bonus created by money fleeing from high taxes may of course prove in some cases to have a boomerang effect. The low cost of debt doubtless has induced some communities to go overboard on expenditures, a problem for *their* taxpayers, present and future. The total of state and local debt has almost quintupled since 1946, from $15.9 billion to $75.0 billion.

It Won't Completely Stop

It would be unrealistic to suppose that reduction, even substantial reduction, in tax rates would put a complete stop to the economic waste that is involved in the great game of hide-and-seek waged between the taxed and the taxer. If levies, however, were pitched at more moderate levels, much of the energy and effort now devoted to avoidance, and much of the resultant economic distortion, could be saved. That alone would go some way toward offsetting the loss in revenue — not to speak of the lift in incentive that tax reduction would afford, or of the fiscal stimulus that could be expected to spur the economy to an increased pace of activity. ◈

IDEAS ON LIBERTY

Climate for Growth

ONE THING America is beginning to learn is that you cannot command growth. You can't just order an economy or a plant to grow. You have to fertilize it, create a climate in which the plant naturally grows, because it can't help doing so. You have to weed out hostile elements and keep the soil favorable to growth.

HENRY FORD II, *What America Expects of Industry*

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the Parable of the Wise Men

LOLA H. TAYLOR

AND IN THOSE DAYS there lived "wise men" in the great cities who said to each other, "Since we are learned and our brethren are ignorant and thus are not capable of making decisions for their own best good, therefore let us form a council among ourselves and we will make these decisions for our unlearned, ignorant brethren.

"And we will cause that there shall be no poor among them, and no one who does not have work, or the wherewithal to sustain himself in case he should be unable or unwilling to work.

"And we will take a portion of the substance from each one who labors to sustain his household, and we will distribute it among the poor and thus will all be prospered by our great wisdom and learning."

Now these "wise men" were honest in heart and meant no injustice to their brethren, nevertheless they did sin against them in that they did take away the God-given free agency of each man to decide what he would do with the fruits of his labor – whether he would spend it wisely or waste it, and whether he would give to the poor.

And because it was the law that the "wise men" made that they would provide for the poor, and because they took ever larger portions of the substance of those who labored, the love of man for his neighbor waxed cold, and he began to say, "Let the 'wise men' with their decrees take care of the poor and unfortunate."

Mrs. Taylor is a housewife, mother, and full-time secretary, with free lancing as a hobby.

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And in those days also, came evil men who sought for power over their fellow men, and they began to join with the "wise men" and to say, "We, too, would help our poor ignorant brethren, in that we would take from those that have and give to those that have not. And we will cause that no man shall be lifted above his neighbor because of his great wealth." And so great was the likeness of the things which they sought to do and the power they thus obtained, that no one could tell which was the "wise man" of good intent or the evil man who sought power over them.

And it came to pass that the taxes placed upon those who labored became so grievous, and the multitude of laws and decrees became so burdensome that they began to murmur and to feel that they labored in vain, and they began to be unwilling to be taxed to provide for those who would not labor.

And the men of wealth said in their hearts, "Why should we further deplete our riches to produce goods when the laws of the 'wise men' will not allow us to keep our gain or dispose of it according to our desire." And thus it became necessary for the "wise men" to issue still more decrees, that the goods might continue to be produced. And all men, both rich and poor, became more and more in bondage to the laws of the "wise men."

And the oppressed cried out for their free agency; but their cries went unheeded because of the multitude who still cried, "We prefer security to freedom." And this multitude worshiped the laws of the "wise men" as their Provider, being deceived in that they believed the laws to be the source of all goodness, not knowing that laws and administrators of laws produce nothing, but take from one to give to another.

And the "wise men" said, "We must give the people security so we may continue to rule over them." And though some of the "wise men" began to perceive the folly of their ways, they found it was not within their power to restore the free agency which they had taken from their brethren, because of the evil men among them who had gained control through the many laws and decrees that had gone forth.

And then did the "wise men" know that they had lost their own free agency to the evil men among them. And they with all their families were brought down into bondage with their unlearned brethren. And a loud wail went up from all those who had forgotten God, in anxiety lest he should have forgotten them also.

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THE LESSER OF Two Evils

LEONARD E. READ

ACCORDING TO *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, "the existence of only two major parties, as in most English-speaking countries, presupposes general public agreement on constitutional questions and on the aims of government." The reason for two parties is that each might keep a check on the other in order that neither party exceeds its constitutional bounds. The competitive two-party system, so it was thought, would assure a continuum of moral as well as political rectitude. The competition would expose and thus rid the public offices of charlatans; only statesmen would hold down the jobs.

Certainly the two-party system aimed at, if it did not presuppose, honest candidates contending for office; that is, each office seeker fairly presenting his own beliefs, leaving to the voters the matter of choosing. In respectable two-party theory the candidate tries to persuade the voters that *his* views are the ones they should support. Clearly, the theory did not include the idea that vying candidates should be nothing but mere responses to voter opinion polls. That would be senseless. Were this the case, we could now feed all voter opinions into an electronic computer and, within a few seconds, have all legislation written for us!

Regardless of how respectable the theory, its practice has come a cropper. Today, trimming is so much in vogue that often a voter cannot cast a ballot except for one of two trimmers. Heard over and over again is the apology, "Well, the only choice I had was to vote for the lesser of two evils." Implicit in this confession are a moral tragedy and a political fallacy which, in combination, must eventually lead to economic disaster.

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I. THE MORAL TRAGEDY

It is morally tragic whenever a citizen's only choice is between two wrongdoers – that is, between two trimmers.

A trimmer, according to the dictionary, is one who changes his opinions and policies to suit the occasion. In contemporary political life, he is any candidate whose position on issues depends solely on what he thinks will have most voter appeal. He ignores the dictates of his higher conscience, trims his personal idea of what is morally right, tailors his stand to the popular fancy. Integrity, the accurate reflection in word and deed of that which is thought to be morally right, is sacrificed to expediency.

The above are severe charges, and I do not wish to be misunderstood. One of countless personal experiences will help clarify what is meant: A candidate for Congress sat across the desk listening to my views about limited government. At the conclusion of an hour's discussion he remarked, "I am in thorough accord with your views; you are absolutely right. But I couldn't get elected on any such platform, so I shall represent myself as holding views other than these." He might as well have added, "I propose, in my campaign, to bear false witness."

No doubt the candidate thought, on balance, that he was justified, that righteousness would be better served were he elected – regardless of how untruthfully he represented his position – than were he to stand for his version of the truth and go down to defeat.

This candidate is "a mixed-up kid." His values are topsy-turvy, as the saying goes. In an egotism that has no parallel, he puts his election to office above honesty. Why, asks the responsible voter, should I endorse dishonesty by voting for such a candidate? He has, on his own say-so, forsworn virtue by insisting on bearing false witness. Does he think his ambition for office is right because he needs a job? Then let him seek employment where want of principle is less harmful to others. Or, is his notion of rightness based on how much the rest of us would benefit by having him as our representative? What? A person without moral scruple representing us in Congress! The role of the legislator is to secure our rights to life, liberty, and property – that is, to protect us against fraud, violence, predation, and misrepresentation (false witness). Would our candidate have us believe that "it takes a crook to catch a crook"?

Such righteousness or virtue as

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exists in the mind of a man does not and cannot manifest itself in the absence of integrity – the honest, accurate reflection in deeds of one's real beliefs. Without this virtue the other virtues must lie dormant and unused. What else remains? It is doubtful if anything contributes more to the diseased condition of society than the diminishing practice of integrity.

Those who attach this much importance to integrity must perforce construe trimming as evil. Therefore, when both candidates for public office are judged to be trimmers, the one who trims less than the other is often regarded as "the lesser of two evils." But, is he really? It must be conceded that there are gradations of wrongdoing: killing is worse than stealing, and perhaps stealing is worse than covetousness. At least, if wrongdoing is not comparative, then it is self-evident that the best of us are just as evil as the worst of us; for man is fallible, all men!

Principles Will Not Bend

While categories of wrongdoing are comparative, it does not follow that wrong deeds within any given category of evil are comparative. For instance, it is murder whether one man is slain, or two. It is stealing whether the amount is ten cents or a thousand dollars. And, a lie is a lie whether told to one person or to a million. "Thou shalt not kill"; "Thou shalt not steal"; "Thou shalt not bear false witness" are derived from principles. Principles do not permit of compromise; they are either adhered to or surrendered.

Is trimming comparative? Can one trimmer be less at fault than another trimmer? Does the *quantity* of trimming have anything whatsoever to do with the matter? Or, rather, is this not a question of *quality* or character? To trim is to ignore the dictates of higher conscience; it is to take flight from integrity. Is not the candidate who will trim once for one vote likely to trim twice for more votes? Does he not demonstrate by any single act of trimming, regardless of how minor, that he stands ready to abandon the dictates of conscience for the place he seeks in the political sun? Does not the extent or quantity of trimming merely reflect a judgment as to how much trimming is expedient?

If the only relevant question at issue is whether or not a candidate will trim at all, then trimming is not comparative and, thus, it would be incorrect to report, "I cast my ballot for the lesser of two evils." Accuracy would require, "I felt there was no choice

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except to cast a ballot for one of two men, both of whom have sacrificed integrity for the hope of votes."

Irresponsible Citizenship

We must not, however, heap all our condemnation on candidates who trim. There would be no such candidates were it not for voters who trim. Actually, when we find only trimmers to vote for, most of us are getting what we deserve. The trimmers who succeed in offering themselves as candidates are, by and large, mere reflections of irresponsible citizenship – that is, of neglected thinking, study, education, vigilance. Candidates who trim and voters who trim are each cause and each effect; they feed on each other.

To repeat, when one must choose between men who forsake integrity, the situation is tragic, and there is little relief at the polling level except as candidates of integrity may be encouraged by voters of integrity. Impractical idealism? Of course not! Read Edmund Burke, one of the great statesmen of all time, addressing his constituency:

"But his (the candidate's) unbiased opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience, he ought not to sacrifice to you, to any man, or to any set of men living. These he does not derive from your pleasure – no, nor from the law and the Constitution. They are a trust from Providence, for the abuse of which he is deeply answerable. Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion."

II. THE POLITICAL FALLACY

Is it fallacious to believe that responsible citizenship requires casting a ballot for one or the other of two candidates, *regardless of how far the candidates have departed from moral rectitude?*

Before trying to arrive at an answer, let us reflect on the reason why the so-called duty of casting a ballot, regardless of circumstance, is so rarely questioned. Quite obviously, the duty to vote is one of those sanctified institutions, such as motherhood, which is beyond criticism. The obligation to vote at any and all elections, whatever the issues or personalities, is equated with responsible citizenship. Voting is deeply embedded in the democratic mores as a duty, and one does not affront the mores without the risk of scorn. To do so is to "raise the dead"; it is to resurrect questions that have been settled once and for all; it is to throw doubt on custom, tradition, orthodoxy, the folkways!

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Yet any person who is conscious of our rapid drift toward the omnipotent state can hardly escape the suspicion that there may be a fault in our habitual way of looking at things. If the suspicion be correct, then it would be fatal never to examine custom. So, let us bring the sanctity of voting into the open and take a hard look at it, not in the spirit of advocating something but of exploring it.

Hitler vs. Stalin

Now for the hard look: Where is the American who will argue that responsible citizenship requires casting a ballot if a Hitler and a Stalin were the opposing candidates? "Ah," some will complain, "you carry the example to an absurdity." Very well, let us move closer to home and our own experience.

Government in the U.S.A. has been pushed far beyond its proper sphere. The Marxian tenet, "from each according to ability, to each according to need," backed by the armed force of the state, has become established polity. This is partly rationalized by something called "the new economics." Within this kind of political framework, it is to be expected that one candidate will stand for the coercive expropriation of the earned income of all citizens, giving the funds thus gathered to those in groups A, B, and C. Nor need we be surprised that his opponent differs from him only in advocating that the loot be given to those in groups X, Y, and Z. Does responsible citizenship require casting a ballot for either of these political plunderers? The citizen has no significant moral choice but only an immoral choice in the event he has joined the unholy alliance himself and thinks that one of the candidates will deliver some of the largess to him or to a group he favors. In the latter case, the problem is not one of responsible citizenship but of irresponsible looting.

Registering a Protest

Does responsible citizenship require voting for irresponsible candidates? To ballot in favor of irresponsible candidates as though it were one's duty is to misconstrue the meaning of duty. To cast a ballot for a trimmer, because no man of integrity is offering himself, does as much as one can with a ballot to encourage other trimmers to run for office. Can anyone conceive of any element of protest in such balloting? To vote for a trimmer goes further: it would seem to urge, as strongly as one can at the polls, that men of integrity not offer themselves as candidates.

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What would happen if we adopted as a criterion: *Never vote for a trimmer!* Conceding a generous liberality on the part of the electorate, millions of us would not cast ballots. Would the end result of this substantial, nonviolent protest, this large-scale demonstration of "voting by turning our backs," worsen our situation? It is difficult to imagine how it could. For a while we would continue to get what we now have: a high percentage of trimmers and plunderers in public office, men who promise privileges in exchange for ballots – and freedom. In time, however, with this silent but eloquent refusal to participate, the situation might, conceivably, improve. Men of integrity and high moral quality – statesmen – might show forth and, if so, we could add their numbers to the few now in office.

Would a return to integrity by itself solve our problem? No, for many men of integrity do not understand freedom; or, if they do, are not devoted to it. But it is only among men of integrity that any solution can *begin* to take shape. Such men, at least, will do the right as they see the right; they tend to be teachable. Trimmers and plunderers, on the other hand, are the enemies of morality and freedom by definition; their motivations are below the level of principles; they cannot see beyond the emoluments of office.[1]

Here is a thought to weigh: If respect for a candidate's integrity were widely adopted as a criterion for casting a ballot, millions of us, as matters now stand, would not cast ballots. Yet, in a very practical sense, would not those of us who protest in this manner be voting? Certainly, we would be *counted* among that growing number who, by our conscious and deliberate inaction, proclaim that we have no party. What other choice have we at the polling level? Would not this encourage men of statesmanlike qualities to offer themselves in candidacy?

A Sacred Institution

Why is so much emphasis placed upon voting as a responsibility of citizenship?[2] Why the sanctity at-

[1] If it be conceded that the role of government is to secure "certain unalienable rights, that among them are the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," by what stretch of the imagination can this be achieved when we vote for those who are openly committed to unsecuring these rights?

[2] Responsibilities of citizenship involve a host of personal attributes, first and foremost a duty to one's Maker, duty to self, to family, to neighbors, and so on. Is it not evident, therefore, that voting is a mere formality after the fact? *It's much too late to be a responsible citizen if the responsibility hasn't been exercised before election day.* Everybody voted for Khrushchev in the last Russian election! Clearly, that was no evidence of responsible citizenship.

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tached to voting? Foremost, no doubt, is a carry-over from an all-but-lost ideal in which voting is associated with making choices between honest beliefs, between candidates of integrity. We tend to stick with the form without regard to what has happened to the substance. Further, it may derive in part from the general tendency to play the role of Robin Hood, coupled with a reluctance to acknowledge this practice for what it is. Americans, at least, have some abhorrence of forcibly taking from the few and giving to the many without any sanction whatsoever. That would be raw dictatorship. But few people with this propensity feel any pangs of conscience if it can be demonstrated that "the people voted for it." Thus, those who achieve political power are prone to seek popular sanction for what they do. And, as government increases its plundering activities, more and more citizens "want in" on the popular say-so. Thus it is that pressures increase for the extension of the franchise. Time was when only property holders could vote or, perhaps, even cared to vote. In 1870 the franchise was extended to Negroes and in 1920 to women. Now the drive is on to lower the age from 21 to 18, and this has already been achieved in some places.

Frederic Bastiat gave us some good thoughts on this subject:

"If law were restricted to protecting all persons, all liberties, and all properties; if law were nothing more than the organized combination of the individual's right to self-defense; if law were the obstacle, the check, the punisher of all oppression and plunder — is it likely that we citizens would then argue much about the extent of the franchise?

"Under these circumstances, is it likely that the extent of the right to vote would endanger that supreme good, the public peace? Is it likely that the excluded classes would refuse to peaceably await the coming of their right to vote? Is it likely that those who had the right to vote would jealously defend their privilege?

"If the law were confined to its proper functions, everyone's interest in the law would be the same. Is it not clear that, under these circumstances, those who voted could not inconvenience those who did not vote?"[3]

An Alternative

We can, it seems to me, glean from the foregoing that there is no moral or political or social obligation to vote merely because we are confronted with ballots having names and/or issues printed thereon. Has this so-called obligation of a citizen to vote, *regard-*

[3] See *The Law* by Frederic Bastiat, pp. 16-17. Obtainable from the Foundation for Economic Education (76 pp. $1.00 paper; $1.75 cloth).

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less of the ballot presentations, any more to support it than political madness on the rampage? And, further, does this not deny to the citizen the only alternative left to him – not to endorse persons or measures he regards as repugnant? When presented with two trimmers, how else, *at this level*, is he to protest? Abstinence from ballot-casting would appear to be his only way to avoid being untrue to himself.

If we seek more evidence than we now have as to the sacrosanctity of ballot casting as a citizenship duty, we need only observe the crusading spirit of get-out-the-vote campaigns. One is made to feel like a slacker if he does not respond.

To rob this get-out-the-vote myth of its glamour, no more is required than to compare ballot-casting as a means of selecting representatives with a method *devoid of all voter judgment*: selection by lot. Politically unthinkable as it is, reflect, just for example, on your own congressional district. Disqualify all under 21, all of the insane, all illiterates, all convicts.[4] Write the names of the balance on separate cards to put into a mixing machine, and let some blindfolded person withdraw one card. Presto! Here is your next representative in Congress, *for one term only*. After all, how can a person qualify to vote if he is not qualified to hold the office himself? And, further, it is assumed, he will feel duty-bound to serve, as when called for jury duty.

Wanted: An "Ordinary Citizen"

The first reaction to such a procedure is one of horror: "Why, we might get only an ordinary citizen." Very well. Compare such a prospect with one of two wrongdoers which all too frequently is our only choice under the two-party, ballot-casting system. Further, I submit that there is no governmental official, today, who can qualify as anything better than an "ordinary citizen." How can he possibly claim any superiority over those upon whose votes his election depends? And, it is of the utmost importance that we never ascribe anything more to any of them. Not one among the millions in officialdom is in any degree omniscient, all-seeing, or competent in the slightest to rule over the creative aspects of any other citizen. The recognition that a citizen chosen by lot could be no more than an ordinary citizen would be all to the good. This

[4] One might like to disqualify everybody who receives governmental aid but, then, who would remain? The very bread we eat is subsidized. Those who ride on planes or use the mails, and so on, would be disqualified.

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would automatically strip officialdom of that aura of almightiness which so commonly attends it; government would be unseated from its master's role and restored to its servant's role, a highly desirable shift in emphasis.

Probable Consequences

Reflect on some of the other probable consequences:

a. With nearly everyone conscious that only "ordinary citizens" were occupying political positions, the question of *who should rule* would lose its significance. Immediately, we would become acutely aware of the far more important question: *What should be the extent of the rule?* That we would press for a severe limitation of the state seems almost self-evident.

b. No more talk of a "third party" as a panacea. Political parties, which have become all but meaningless as we know them, would cease to exist.

c. No more campaign speeches with their promises of how much better we would fare were the candidates to spend our income for us.

d. An end to campaign fund-raising.

e. No more self-chosen "saviors" catering to base desires in order to win elections.

f. An end to that type of voting in Congress which has an eye more to re-election than to what's right.

g. The mere prospect of having to go to Congress during a lifetime, even though there would be but one chance in some 10,000, would completely reorient citizens' attention to the principles which bear on government's relationship to society. Everyone would have an incentive to "bone up," as the saying goes, if for no other reason than not to make a fool of himself, just in case! There would be an enormous increase in self-directed education in an area on which the future of society depends. In other words, the strong tendency would be to bring out the best, not the worst, in every citizen.

It would, of course, be absurd to work out the details, to refine, to suggest the scope of a selection-by-lot design, for it hardly falls within the realm of either probability or possibility – at least, not for a long, long time. Further, only folly would be heaped on absurdity were one to advocate any meddling with the present machinery.

Reform Follows Understanding

Why, if one believes mass voting to be inferior to selection by lot, should one not urge immediate reform? Let me slightly re-

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phrase an explanation by Gustave Le Bon:

The reason is that it is not within our power to force sudden transformations in complex social organisms. Nature has recourse, at times, to radical measures, but never after our fashion, which explains how it is that nothing is more fatal to a people than the mania for great reforms, however excellent these reforms may appear theoretically. They would only be useful were it possible suddenly to change a whole nation of people. Men are ruled by ideas, sentiments, customs – these are of men's essence. Institutions (social organisms) and laws are but the outward manifestation or outcome of the underlying ideas, sentiments, customs, in short, character. To urge a different outcome would in no way alter men's character – or the outcome.[5]

Why, then, should selection by lot be so much as mentioned? Merely to let the mind dwell on this intriguing alternative to current political inanities gives all the ammunition one needs to refrain from casting a ballot for one of two candidates, neither of whom is guided by integrity. Unless we can divorce ourselves from this unprincipled myth, we are condemned to a political competition that has only one end: the omnipotent state. This would conclude all economic freedom and with it, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of worship. And even freedom to vote will be quite worthless – as it is under any dictatorship.

Responsible citizenship demands, first of all, a personal attention to and a constant re-examination of one's own ideas, sentiments, customs. Such scrutiny may reveal that voting for candidates who bear false witness is not required of the good citizen. At the very least, the idea merits thoughtful exploration. ◈

[5] See *The Crowd* by Gustave Le Bon (New York: The Viking Press, 1960), p. 4. $1.45 paperback.

IDEAS ON LIBERTY

Something for Nothing

OCCASIONALLY, under certain "welfare state" programs such as Social Security, it is possible actually to get something for nothing, provided your definition of nothing is broad enough to include such things as self-respect, integrity, and consideration for the lives, the property, and the liberty of others of your own and of future generations.

LEWIS STEARNS

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HARRY L. SMITH

CONFUSION about Democracy

THERE IS considerable confusion today as between democratic institutions and democratic ideals. Democratic institutions such as the judicial, legislative, and administrative branches of the government, the constitution, parliamentary procedures, and the voting system are devices to guarantee individual liberty. They are a *modus operandi* and their only justification is their performance in defending freedom.

Today, however, these institutions are becoming more sacrosanct than the ideals they were supposed to defend. The Western world seems to prefer a constitutional government to other forms, even though it destroys democratic ideals. Consequently, dictators who have usurped power by devious means try desperately to have themselves "elected," and often maintain a captive congress or distort a constitution to suit their ends.

According to the basic democratic ideal, individuals should be free to determine their own destiny. This concept presumes that all men are basically human and with few exceptions can be trusted to live harmoniously and take care of their own needs.

The original democratic philosophers recognized that two small groups could not be so trusted:

(1) After many centuries of experience it had been shown that men could not be trusted to handle vast political power. Therefore, checks and balances were devised to effect limited government. Democratic institutions were to be highly decentralized through state, county, and township authority, and thus political power could be spread thinly throughout the land.

(2) The other group comprised

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the few who proved themselves incapable of assuming the responsibilities of life and could not take care of themselves because of mental or physical deficiencies. Such cases would be restrained or helped through family responsibility or by the community.

But it was presumed that the vast majority of families were composed of responsible, self-reliant individuals capable of originating and controlling their behavior and of providing for their own wants in sickness and in health.

The democratic experiment proved eminently successful. Freedom developed dignified, self-sufficient, hard-working individuals.

This was especially true in the New World where constant expansion into new territory made communities fend for themselves and kept centralized authority at a distance. The experiment brought the most peaceful century the world could recall, and material wealth evolved as never before.

Human behavior apparently had some natural checks and balances of its own, as predicted by the philosophers. Trust engendered trust, and wealth developed wealth. The enjoyment and benefits of freedom rang throughout the world.

Opposed to the democratic ideal have been various political concepts devised throughout the ages. Monarchs and emperors presumed that only the few at the top should be trusted, and that their subjects were basically inhuman and belligerent, incapable of taking care of themselves, fit only to be directed and ruled.

To avoid chaos, the tyrants severely disciplined their subjects while the more benevolent monarchs tried to help them, but neither trusted the individual to lead his own life. This lack of faith in human nature has evolved into modern communism, which also assumes that order can be maintained only by rigid centralized control.

Less Faith in Individual, More Reliance on the State

The trend of the twentieth century depicts a waning faith in the individual, who in turn responds with less faith in himself. Immorality is on the rise, family responsibility is declining, and state security is becoming the goal of ruler and subject. Compulsory social security schemes are being imposed on entire nations and on people in all walks of life. Men are no longer trusted to take care of medical bills or retirement problems. Other necessities, such as food, clothing, and housing, are often provided.

Formerly, the law established

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general rules to be followed in various activities, and the few who broke these laws were prosecuted. Today the majority are so mistrusted that mushrooming federal agencies arbitrate day-to-day decisions in communications, travel, trade, labor, investment, and industry. Complex economic theories are constantly being devised to justify the procedure. Gone is the ideal of decentralized authority and self-responsibility. Greater political power is now concentrated in the capitals of the great democracies than was ever dreamed of by Charlemagne or Napoleon.

The threat of communism is being met halfway. Nationalism, the sentiment which makes men hate all countries but their own, is on the rise. Governments, impotent to create wealth of their own, depend on the few most gifted individuals to finance their burgeoning schemes and bureaucracies. When the few prove incapable of providing all the services required, the general populace finds itself taxed to provide its own "benefits." The creation of wealth is thus seriously hindered. Democratic institutions are proving defective under the lure of political power and regulated security. Foolproof protections for democratic ideals have not yet been devised.

The Prod of Insecurity

Like it or not, life has been designed to foster personal striving. Had nature planned otherwise, we would all be provided with thick hides to obviate the necessity for clothing and shelter, and with stomachs which could digest plentiful grass.

But man is destined for greater things than a cow-like character, and the prod of insecurity is required to make him face up to life. Life is also stratified for a purpose. No two individuals are born exactly alike, and each has his capacity for living, learning, and loving. All but the pitiful few have a capacity for self-improvement and can aspire to a higher stratum. Without this ladder, there would be no rewards in life. From man's worm's-eye-view, the ladder appears to have too many steps and the penalties at the bottom seem too severe.

In his frantic effort to avoid the prod of insecurity man has consented to slavery, feudalism, fascism, and communism. Yet these systems have only spread the rungs farther apart.

The insidious horror of centralized authority is that the more men depend on government, the less they become men. Natural maturing processes are arrested — the result of pity and paternalism misapplied. This is not an unusual

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condition in history, but a sharp reversal from the ideals developed during the past two centuries.

There is a great conflict of ideologies between the free and communist worlds. In Western civilization it is believed that men are composed of mind, body, and spirit.

Communist atheists believe in only mind and body. If in truth the spirit does not exist, then it makes little difference under what form of government we exist.

If we are nothing but intelligent ants, then communism may very well be an excellent way of maintaining law and order. But if the spirit exists, we must live by its rules and have faith in its powers. Those who do not believe in the spirit cynically look on life as a vale of tears to be lived craftily and warily.

Those who believe in the spirit seek to satisfy the hungers of the heart with rich rewards in this life and the next. Such people try to face life squarely, and thereby learn to love it. Authorities who interfere with this process are tinkering with delicate mechanisms of the universe.

The greatness of a nation is not determined by the size of the population, by its wealth, or by its military might. It can be as small as Switzerland or as large as the United States.

A great nation is one composed of free, dignified, self-reliant individuals having faith in God and themselves. Such men can only be created in an environment of freedom. Men must be inspired to seek this ideal. If this is accomplished, material benefits will come by themselves. ◈

DEAN RUSSELL

Democracy and Guaranteed Jobs

A FAVORITE CLICHÉ of those who have faith in the welfare state is this: In a democracy, we can have both guaranteed jobs and freedom of choice.

Those people are aware that in a dictatorship it doesn't work out that way. But millions of sincere Americans honestly believe that it can be different in a democracy. Well, it can't – as was illustrated beyond any shadow of a doubt in Great Britain when the leaders of the labor unions were running the government there from 1945 to 1950.

In peacetime, in the oldest de-

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mocracy in the world, once-free men were driven underground to mine coal when they did not wish to do so. They were fined and imprisoned by their own democratically elected leaders because they imagined their government could guarantee them jobs without compelling them to work at specific jobs. Here is a factual report of a small segment of that sorry experiment under a democratic government:

In February 1946, Sir Stafford Cripps [Chancellor of the Exchequer in Britain's government] said: "No country in the world, as far as I know, has yet succeeded in carrying through a planned economy without the direction of labor. Our objective is to carry through a planned economy without the direction of labor...."

On the 10th of March 1949 the Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Labor announced that between October 1947 and December 1948 "374 directions were issued to men who were in the mining industry compelling them to remain in that industry, and 132 directions were issued to men in agriculture keeping them in agriculture...." In fairness to the government it should be said that no member of it is in favor of the direction of labor. Despite their good intentions they have failed, not because they will tyranny, far from it, but because, ignoring the experience of every other country, they are wedded to the theory of the Planned State....

Today Sir Stafford can repeat his first speech: "No country in the world, as far as I know, has yet succeeded in carrying through a planned economy without the direction of labor."[1]

Fortunately, the British people were able to turn back the clock toward freedom before total disaster engulfed them. But the union leaders and the other welfare staters never give up. They will return with their planned economy when those of a new generation again accept the belief that their government is obligated to provide a job for every man who is unemployed through no specific fault of his own. ◈

[1] R. Hopkin Morris, Member of Parliament, from his booklet *Dare or Despair*, published by International Liberal Exchange, London, 1949.

IDEAS ON LIBERTY

The Market Method

When any commodity is carried to market, it is not the necessity of the vendor, but the necessity of the purchaser that determines the price.

EDMUND BURKE, *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity*, 1795

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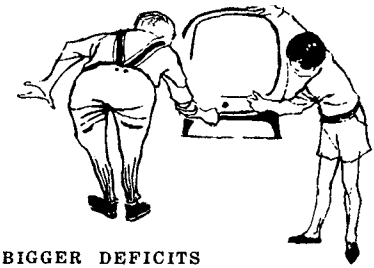


CUTTING TAXES

or — ATTAINING BIGGER DEFICITS

The frost was laying fresh designs
On every window pane.
Old Kaspar washed the supper plates
And stacked them up to drain,
While Peterkin and Wilhelmine
Looked at the television screen.

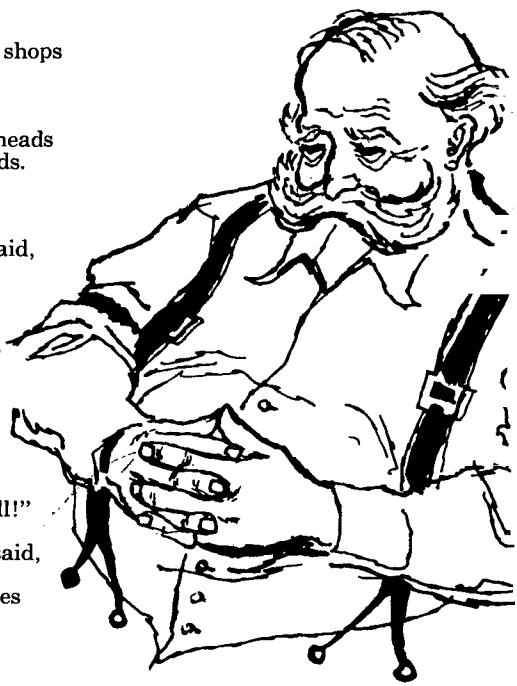
They saw the merchants close their shops
And brokers quit their seats
To join the wildly cheering crowds
Along the city streets,
Where congressmen with bandaged heads
Were wending homeward to their beds.

"I wonder what," said Peterkin,
"The shouting's all about."
"Those congressmen," Old Kaspar said,
"Have put the slump to rout
By breaking down the fiscal wall
That trapped and paralyzed us all."

"Was that the Wall of East Berlin?"
Asked little Wilhelmine.
"It was a wall of taxes, dear,
The highest ever seen.
It clogged the sale of merchandise
And blocked the path of enterprise."

"Now tell us how they broke the wall!"
Cried little Peterkin.
"They found the courage," Kaspar said,
"And iron discipline
To gather up their cliques and claques
And vote against the Income Tax."

"With taxes down," asked Peterkin,
"Will they cut spending, too?"
"Now that is something," Kaspar sighed,
"They're very loath to do,
Because we'd lose the benefits
Of soaring federal deficits."



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INDIVIDUALISM versus COMMONISM

CLARENCE B. CARSON

THERE IS no difficulty today in getting assent to the proposition that something untoward has happened to individualism in America. It is a commonplace saying that conformity has been raised to the position of a prime virtue and that the individual is being sacrificed to the group. There has been a spate of books since World War II devoted to expounding this thesis. William H. Whyte, in *The Organization Man,* contends that even the most powerful spokesman of individualism, the corporation man, is using the language of individualism to "stave off the thought that he himself is in a collective as pervading as any ever dreamed of by the reformers, the intellectuals, and the utopian visionaries he so regularly warns against."[1] David Riesman and colleagues, in *The Lonely Crowd,* detail the loss of independence by Americans and ascribe it to a change in the American character from "inner direction" to "other direction." Erich Kahler, in a recent work, declares: "Today we are witnessing and are deeply involved in a huge process of human transformation. This transformation seems to tend toward some formation beyond the individual. However, it manifests itself in diverse processes of disruption or invalidation of the individual."[2]

The literature proclaiming the existence and analyzing the phenomena of conformity is bountiful. It runs the gamut from novels to popular treatises to psychological explorations to sociological monographs, from *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* to *The Exurbanites* to *The Hidden Persuaders* to *A Nation of Sheep.* Reports come in that college students are

[1] William H. Whyte, Jr., *The Organization Man* (Garden City, N. Y.: George Braziller, 1957), p. 6.

[2] Erich Kahler, *The Tower and the Abyss* (New York: George Braziller, 1957), p. xiii.

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passive, that young men seek secure positions in giant corporations, that home buyers seek domicile in suburbia with its row upon row of uniform houses, that men prefer public relief to migration in search of new jobs.

The ease of manipulating Americans *en masse* is apparent to any perceptive observer. For several decades now Americans have been prone to mass crazes from Mah Jong to hula hoops, to hero worship from Charles A. Lindbergh to Elvis Presley, to popular songs, to matinee idols, and to all sorts of fads. National propaganda has apparently been able, in the last twenty years, to get us to hate the Germans and Italians, despise the Russians, love the Finns, loathe the Japanese, embrace the Russians, ignore the Finns, admire the Germans, Italians, and Japanese, and suspect the Russians, in that order.

As I said, there is much agreement that individualism has declined precipitately in America. But at this point consensus ends sharply. There must be almost as many explanations of the phenomena as there are accounts of it. Some will offer such standard explanations as industrialization, urbanization, the end of the frontier, and the population increase. Others attach the change to such developments as advertising, propaganda, the mass media of communication, the progressive methods of education, the growth of the corporation, the spread of unionism, the enactment of near universal suffrage, or the strained international situation. As usual, we strain at gnats and swallow camels. The above developments doubtless have had a debilitating effect upon the practice of individualism in America. But whether they are taken separately or considered in concert, they are symptoms of the ailment, not the efficient cause. They are the *means* by which individualism has been overturned, not the *end* which has wrought the change.

Confusing Terminology

The main reason why we have not recognized the sources of the change from individualism in America is that they have not been defined in terms of individualism. Many of those who have worked to undermine the premises of individualism and to institute non-individualistic practices have done so in the name of the individual. They have been able to do this because, in part, they were the proponents of and were able to operate within a context of relativism, irrationalism, and disemboweled romanticism. They could use vague language and did not find it necessary to define their

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ends clearly. In consequence, they have been able to hack away most of the framework of individualism with only a minimum of coherent objections from the defenders of it.

The task which I propose to undertake here is to define both individualism and that which has undermined it in such a way that they can be identified. This is only a first step toward understanding what has happened to individualism historically, but it is a necessary step. The definitions will both be abstracted from the actual historical development of the ideas in America.

The Individual as the Prime Unit

Individualism, as an idea or set of beliefs, is the belief in the *primary* and *final* importance of the individual. That is, it is the belief that the individual is the prime unit out of which arise all other units, whether they be groups, collectives, organizations, societies, states, or civilizations. Individualists usually hold that since these groupings were brought into being by combinations of individuals, they exist for the individual. The individual is the final unit in that it is his fulfillment for which the combinations exist. Eschatologically, the individual is the ultimate unit, in that he alone, not any group, survives eternally. But final unit may be a better phrase because there have been individualists both among temporally oriented humanists and among those who believe in life beyond this earth.

Modern (post-Medieval) thought about individualism has focused upon the uniqueness of each individual. It is a major tenet of individualism that it is the differences, the uniqueness, from one man to another which constitute the real significance of the individual. It is a man's peculiar talents, needs, interests, purposes, and possessions which differentiate him from other men and make him so important. All that he holds in common with other men can serve only to meld him into an undifferentiated mass. His distinct being, his creativity, his significant existence, derive and proceed from his uniqueness.

Room for Development

Room for the development of the uniqueness of the individual is the major social requirement of individualism. Many of the ideas associated with individualism derive from this need. Freedom, for example, is a *sine qua non* of individualism just as coercion is anathema to it. The individual must be free to determine his purposes, free to seek to fulfill his needs, free to associate or not to associ-

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ate with others in pursuing his goals.

It does not follow that the way must be paved for him, or that he will achieve his fulfillment if he is solicitously aided by others. Rather, the individual needs a society in which he is put on his own to provide for his needs, in which he is at liberty to pursue his goals, in which when he has developed his potentiality it stands a chance of being rewarded, in which relations are voluntary, in which pressures and forces are kept at a minimum. Such, at any rate, was the freedom which nineteenth century individualists thought was pertinent to their development.

A Corresponding Duty

Such freedom would make society difficult if there were not a corresponding development of individual *responsibility*. Individualism *was* a *social* theory, and many exponents of it made individual responsibility a major requirement for its embodiment in society. Logically, if the individual is free to develop his potentialities, he is responsible for the consequences of their development or for his activities as he develops.

Another corollary was that each individual's freedom ends where another's begins. When such a principle was applied to property rights, it meant that the law which protected one man's property from trespass restrained him from trespassing on the property of another. Ideally, it would be better if the individual had developed a strong sense of responsibility for his actions. Failing this, however, society was once thought to be serving a salutary function when it held an individual responsible when he violated the rights of other individuals. It would be in keeping with individualism to punish a man for intrusion upon the sphere of another. On the other hand, to remove the opportunity for such intrusion would not be individualistic; it would result, most likely, in a curtailment of liberty.

Freedom of Choice

Individualism, liberty, and responsibility were all premised upon the philosophical foundation of a belief in the *freedom of the will*, in the belief that it is possible to make free choices. It is anachronistic to hold an individual responsible for behavior which he did not initiate. To state the principle positively, it is axiomatic that the originator of an action is responsible for its consequences. Logical consistency demands that if an individual is to be held responsible for an action he must have initiated it either by choice, by a

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derelict failure to choose, or, at least, that choice in that instance was possible. Once admit the rule of necessity or determinism and the foundation of individual responsibility would be removed and the counterbalance to freedom have been destroyed.

Less obviously, the belief in individualism, as the idea developed in the nineteenth century, was founded directly upon the role that choice was supposed to play in the development of a man. According to this interpretation, the uniqueness of the individual resulted from day to day choices which led either to the realization of the individual or to his disintegration. Hence, the final or ultimate condition of the individual depended upon his choices.

Once free choice ceases to be the primary factor in men's assessment of a man's position or actions, it will become increasingly difficult to defend practical liberty. If choice has not played a primary role in producing the inequities among men, for example, it will be hard to reconcile these inequities with our sense of justice. Those who have less are deprived not because of their failure but by the scheme of things. In addition, if men act out of necessity, liberty has no ultimate significance; it serves mainly to keep some portion of the population out of prison, for men cannot act otherwise than they do. Such liberty as a society permitted would probably be based upon calculations about the desires of men and the practicality of restraining some of them by removing the opportunity for their fulfillment. In short, liberty would be reduced to permission to do whatever it would be possible to do.

To sum up, the major tenets of individualism are: belief in the primary and final importance of the individual, emphasis upon that which is unique in each man, insistence upon liberty for the realization of the individual, individual responsibility, and freedom of the will. These form the bedrock of ideas which are essential to individualism. They have been supported in the modern era by such divergent ideas as nominalism, Arminianism, rationalism, voluntarism, and idealism. The ideas associated with individualism have been articulated in American (and some European) society in such institutions and practices as constitutional government, establishment of a private sphere by restricting governmental actions by a Bill of Rights, private property, removal of social rules governing inheritance (abolition of primogeniture and entail), free trade, voluntary church membership, individual choice of marriage part-

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ners, private or voluntary associations for providing charity, and so forth.

Individualism has been losing its sway over Americans in the last seventy or eighty years, sometimes gradually, sometimes dramatically and swiftly. This loss is manifested in as simple a matter as the necessity which men now feel to begin any undertaking, regardless of its character or complexity, by forming a committee, establishing a foundation or institute, chartering a corporation, or organizing a club or movement. It is apparent in the massive shifts to governmental responsibility and the proliferation of legalistic rules and regulations which govern our lives. It is evinced in the curtailment of the individual's control of his affairs (compulsory health insurance required by employers and social security by government), in the loss of parental responsibility for and control over children, in governmental propaganda and examination of beliefs.

Men and Ideas

Circumstances have, of course, set the stage for this shift away from individualism, but they have not determined its direction nor guided us into the new course we have set for ourselves. That role has been played by men and ideas, or men under the sway of ideas. There has been a definite direction and it was established on the basis of some fairly definite ideas. The trouble we have had in recognizing them has been the variety of names by which the proponents of these changes have been called and the different means they have proposed toward a common end which they have not been too forward in naming. These men have been supplanting individualism and implanting a new ethos in America. There are several words in current usage which do service as opposites of individualism, i. e., collectivism, socialism, communism, and, I suspect, democracy, though some would heatedly debate the inclusion of the latter. Lester Frank Ward suggested sociocracy, but it did not catch on. The words in common usage are either too vague, too specialized, or too freighted with emotional content for descriptive use. I would like to use a coined word to describe the ethos which has been replacing individualism. The word is *commonism*.

Commonism has the disadvantage of differing from communism by only one letter in its spelling, but it is apt, nonetheless, for descriptive purposes. It implies the end or purpose of this ethos, diametrically opposes it to individualism, and describes the methods

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by which the end is to be achieved. *Commonism* focuses attention upon the common needs, interests, and purposes of mankind, not upon the ways in which men differ from one another. Its main concern is with those things which men share with one another. For example, all men share certain appetites, such as those for food, for warmth, and for attention. The *commonist* would organize society in such a way as to provide all of these efficiently to everyone.

Commonism is the belief that the individual derives his being from the commonality, and derives his *raison d'etre* from society. Implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, *commonism* is the view that the individual exists for society. The *commonist* is at ease among such terms and phrases as *mankind, general welfare, humanity,* the *people,* the *common good,* and the *brotherhood of man,* all of which he tends to interpret in the light of the shared physical needs or desires of men. To the *commonist* it is likely to be the group, collective, state, society, or mankind which endures while the individual terminates with death. The individual has meaning only as he is a part of the group. Such rights and privileges as he possesses come to him from the group and are his during the sufferance of the group. The contemporary *commonist* does not usually recognize anything beyond the collective – mankind, humanity, common welfare – to which to appeal. When the people have spoken, the last word has been said.

The *commonist* may not be an absolute determinist, though he frequently is, but he does attach preponderant importance to heredity and environment in explaining human behavior and human differences. The terms in which he defines his view may differ – economic determinism, environmentalism, psychological determinism –, but the belief that choice is unnecessary to account for human behavior is never far away. He accepts a common responsibility for everything that happens and proclaims the common responsibility of each of us for all of us.

Two Points of Reference

Individualism versus *commonism* – these two terms represent poles between which the changes and conflicts of recent American history can be fruitfully viewed. They may not encompass all that has taken place, but they include enough to throw the developments during these years into revealing relief. It places the conflicts within Congress, the difficult decisions of Presidents, the tendency of court actions into a meaningful context. It is not stretching the point to

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say that the major legislative and legal contests of the last seventy years – the contests over antitrust acts, the creation of regulatory agencies, espionage and sedition acts, the mobilizations for wars, the means of fighting depression, the regulation of organized labor – have had overtones of the general conflict between individualism and *common*ism.

The battles between reformers and conservatives can be profitably viewed in the light of this conflict. Reformers have tended to want to institute *common*ism and conservatives have stood, more often than not, for the old individualistic way – whether the reformer be Theodore Roosevelt or the conservative be Robert A. Taft. Of course, the issue has not always been clear-cut; the alternatives have not always been spelled out; the choices have frequently been between means to the same end.

The successes of *common*ism can be measured in terms of the spread of unionism, the growth of trusts and corporations, the centralization of authority in Washington, the ubiquitous activities of bureaucracies, the proliferation of welfare programs, the assumption of public responsibility for everything from education to housing, the triumph of the "clear and present danger doctrine" of the courts, the sanction of the curtailment of liberties under the rubric of the police powers of the state, and the general ease of legitimating any governmental activity which is claimed to be in the interest of the general welfare. Individualists carried out successful holding actions when voluntarism was preserved, when individual liberty was sustained, when private property was preserved (though the attack has not been directly against private property any more than it has against individual liberty), when governmental action was forestalled, when they succeeded in retaining any responsibility and function for the individual.

The Turning Point

*Common*ism began to take shape in the thinking and writing of some American intellectuals in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Its keynote can be found in a book published by the sociologist Lester Frank Ward in 1893. He said:

"The individual has reigned long enough. The day has come for society to take its affairs into its own hands and shape its own destinies. The individual has acted as best he could. He has acted in the only way he could. With a consciousness, will, and intellect of his own he could do nothing else than pursue his natural ends. He

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should not be denounced nor called any names. He should not even be blamed. Nay, he should be praised, and even *imitated*. Society should learn its great lesson from him, should follow the path he has so clearly laid out that leads to success. It should imagine itself an individual, with all the interests of an individual, and becoming fully *conscious* of these interests it should pursue them with the same indomitable will with which the individual pursues his interests. Not only this, it must be guided, as he is guided, by the social *intellect,* armed with all the knowledge that all individuals combined, with so great labor, zeal, and talent have placed in its possession, constituting the social intelligence."[3]

The list of propagators and progenitors of *common*ism should include Henry George, Richard Ely, Henry Demarest Lloyd, Edward Bellamy, Daniel De Leon, Eugene Debs, Thorstein Veblen, and Jack London, among others. It was forwarded by socialists, communists, muckrakers, preachers of the Social Gospel, nationalists, educationists, and various and assorted Progressives. It was promoted by the development of a "social conscience" and instituted by people who styled themselves liberals.

Individualists were in a majority at the outset of the conflict, of course. At the beginning of the twentieth century they held positions of power and influence. They could denounce, cajole, laugh at, and perhaps persecute the proponents of *common*ism. Even so, the tide was turning the other way; many who talked the language of individualism were deeply embroiled in the business of protecting corporations, promoting imperialistic ventures, putting down unions by the national guard, and turning to government to solve problems. The hammer blows of twentieth century wars and depression blinded many to the nature of the conflict of ideas, and the *common*ists stood ready with their programs to take over.

We are still in the midst of the massive shift from individualism to *common*ism so far as institutions and practices are concerned. But the great change in ideas and beliefs which prepared the way for it took place – so far as most of the populace was concerned – in the first three or four decades of this century. *Common*ist ideas became the common possession of Americans because they came to permeate the literature, the language, the sermons, the lectures and the thought of opinion makers.

[3] Lester F. Ward, "Sociocracy," *American Thought: Civil War to World War I*, intro. by Perry Miller (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1957), pp. 113-14.

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Delaying Actions

There must have been many Americans who did not fall under the sway of *common*ism. Undoubtedly, too, there were untold millions who began to use and think in terms of these ideas unwittingly, and who would have been horrified to discover that any radical change had taken place in their thinking. But these were without effective leadership. The initiative in the contest slipped from the individualists to the *common*ists in this century. Those who spoke for individualism became defenders and apologists of it, were themselves infected by the new ideas and convinced that they must accept some of the programs of the reformers. They compromised. At most, they fought delaying actions, and, as politicians, became known as the "rear guard." Those who think of what to do when some new problem or issue arises stopped thinking of ways to deal with it by individual action and proposed some kind of collective action.

By the mid-twentieth century *common*istic ideas were established in America, and they have been rapidly hardening into an inflexible orthodoxy. It is this orthodoxy which prescribes that every problem must be solved by group action, that world peace must be sought collectively, that the problems of education must be met by federal aid, that symphony orchestras bearing the names of various cities must be supported by money from the national government, that a secularized missionary effort under the auspices of the Peace Corps shall be financed by public funds (i.e., tax monies), that the exploration of space shall be undertaken by governments.

These various programs pass for new ideas when they are first brought forth in current intellectual circles. In fact, they are not that at all. They are rather the articulation of the notions implicit in the assumptions of *common*ism. Indeed, the penchant for raising all difficulties to the national level and defining them as national problems witnesses to a curvature of the mind hardened into an habitual path.

I compress too much, passing over the exceptions, modifications, and subtleties. But it was not my purpose in what I have said to relate the history of the last seventy years. My intention is to call attention to the outline of it to validate the view that the changes of these years can be brought into focus in such a way that their significance stands out by examining them between the poles of individualism versus *common*ism. ◈

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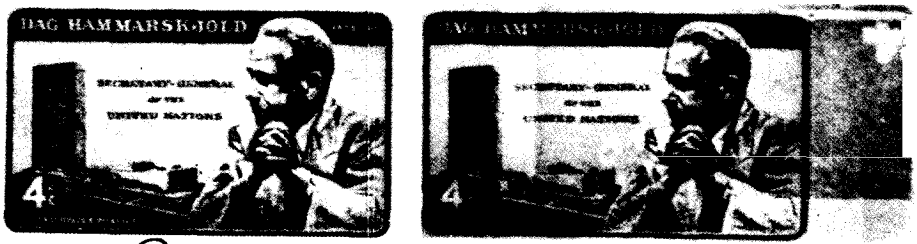

Stamps AND THE LABOR THEORY OF VALUE

LEWIS STEARNS

TO MOST OF US a postage stamp is a means to an end. It is a bit of paper that tells the postal authorities we have paid to have mail delivered.[1] But to a philatelist a stamp is an end in itself, and a misprint is likely to be especially valuable. Therefore, when the government moved recently to flood the market with deliberately misprinted Dag Hammarskjöld commemorative stamps in an effort to wipe out the value to collectors of a few unintentional misprints, philatelists were keenly interested.

This action of the Post Office Department is, however, of more than philatelic interest. The incident offers a remarkable lesson concerning the "labor theory of value" – a theory that is the heart of Marxian economics, and one that enjoys widespread acceptance in the United States today.

The reason the government has taken its action is that the original, unintentional misprints are, according to the statement issued by the Post Office Department, "over-valued." It appears that there is only one reason for destroying this "inflated" value – the idea that when one individual profits, this somehow injures another who does not. This idea is an extreme but logical extension of the labor theory of value which, among other things, holds that what is one man's gain is invariably another man's loss.

But in this case, the illogic of

[1] Of course this represents only a partial payment. The balance is paid through taxes, whether or not we send mail.

Mr. Stearns is a free-lance writer from Missouri.

Illustration: The Dag Hammarskjöld stamp. The misprint is at right.

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the theory is especially noticeable. Who lost? Certainly not the government. Each of the stamps sold for its face value of four cents. What about those of us who didn't get a chance to buy them? We haven't lost a cent. But the people who did buy them gained something. Thus, the outcome was a net gain. A value now exists that did not exist before.

But whence came this extra value? Obviously, it didn't come from anyone's labor. It wasn't any harder to produce the unusual stamps worth hundreds and perhaps thousands of dollars than it was to produce the usual ones worth four cents. There is even a chance that less labor was involved since someone, obviously, was asleep at the switch.

The fact that extra value was created is clear. Now, seeing this, if you believe in the labor theory of value, you can do one of two things. You can admit that the theory is false and begin to look around for another theory – one that fits the facts. Or, you can stick with Marx and deny that this new value exists – in spite of the obvious fact that if you have one of these stamps, a collector will pay you handsomely for it.

If you happen to be one who can accept the brand of "logic" involved in this second alternative, the next logical step is to declare to everyone that the stamps are overvalued – that is, they are not worth what people voluntarily are paying for them. If, in addition to whatever else you have now shown yourself to be, you are also an authoritarian, the final logical step is to attempt to destroy the extra value – that doesn't exist anyway. Once you have done this you will be able to breathe easier and relax again in your private Marxian utopia.

It is important to recognize this incident for what it is – not just an isolated occurrence, of interest only to stamp collectors, but a clear demonstration of an alien philosophy, enervating to liberty, that corrupts our American dream. ◈

IDEAS ON LIBERTY

Supply and Demand

PRICES are determined by supply and demand, and demand is determined by how intensely people want a commodity and what they have to offer in exchange for it.

HENRY HAZLITT, *Economics In One Lesson*

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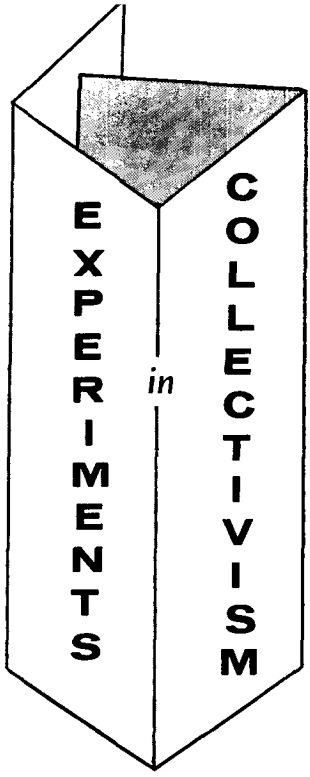

MELVIN D. BARGER

ACCORDING to an article that appeared several years ago in a popular men's magazine, a Bret Harte classic was once rejected for production on the Kraft Theatre because the sponsor thought it promoted communism.

The article was an exposé of sponsor control of TV programming. Obviously enjoying his task, author Al Morgan drew an unflattering picture of the average business sponsor. He was timid, petty, narrow-minded, fearful, and sometimes stupid. And since he saw Bret Harte (who died in 1902) as an ally of the Kremlin, he was obviously irrational about communism.

Here is what the sponsor objected to as being communistic, according to Mr. Morgan:

> In one scene, a group of miners got together and agreed that they would share equally in any ore that came out of the mine they were working.[1]

Well, if *that* was the chief reason for the shelving of Bret Harte's classic, then the business sponsor *did* have a lot to learn about communism. And while Mr. Morgan's example doesn't prove conclusively whether sponsor control is right or wrong, it does typify a popular misconception about Soviet communism. For despite all the twists and turns communism has taken since 1918, there are people around who still believe that it is essentially equalitarian in the sharing of economic goods, and that this is its chief distinction. Numerous USSR experts have assured us that the opposite is true, that there are highly privileged groups in the

Mr. Barger is Editor of *The Flying A*, company magazine of the Aeroquip Corporation at Jackson, Michigan.

[1] Al Morgan, "And Now, a Word from the Sponsor," *Playboy*, December 1959, p. 95.

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Soviet Union, and that incentive plans are used in industry. Though "equal sharing" may still have a place in communist dogma, it has little existence in the real world.

But a more serious error is present here. For even if the Soviets had been able to follow their original aims on "equal sharing," their version differs radically from that practiced by Mr. Harte's miners. In every sense of the word, the miners' collective experiment was *voluntary*. They *agreed* that they would share equally of their ore, and presumably any of them could withdraw from the bargain whenever he became dissatisfied with it. Far from being a kind of communism, their mining venture was simply a variation of free enterprise. There probably have been millions of similar group ventures in the United States, involving everything from berrypicking to the formation of giant steel companies. In many cases, people probably have shared in such a way as to unwittingly carry out the Marxist idea of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." But it is not unjust if all the parties involved agreed to it, if no fraud was involved, and, if they were not forced against their will to subscribe to the arrangement.

When we turn to real communist theory, we find something far more sinister than Mr. Harte's amusing example. Another element is added: *the iron fist of government police power*. Under communism, the collective experiment is no longer voluntary, and the miners are forced to submit to the arrangement no matter how much they might dislike it. And even their right to share equally of their ore has been diluted, for now it has become the property of the state rather than of the men who extracted it.

Early Christian Communities

Let us not, however, belabor Mr. Harte. For, it is not only fictional experiments in collectivism that have been misidentified as communistic. Occasionally one reads, or hears, that the early Christian community of the first century was communistic. We know, for example, that "all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."[2] But no state police power was present to enforce this, and indeed, the authorities of the day used their police power to persecute the community. And it is certain that individual rights were still greatly protected even in this

[2] Acts, 2: 44-45.

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voluntary collective order. It was obviously a free association.

Another venture in collectivism was the community established by Robert Owen, a wealthy British mill owner, in New Harmony, Indiana, early in the last century. A man of socialist leanings whom John Chamberlain identifies as the real author of "Fabianism," Owen founded at New Harmony "a Community of Equality, based on the principle of common property."[3] The experiment quickly ran into rough weather, but its establishment was hardly a communist experiment, as some may mistakenly believe today. Owen had *voluntarily* put up his own money for the venture, and the participants had come of their own accord and were free to leave. No police coercion was involved, although Chamberlain advises us that Owen did become something of a dictator in his last frantic attempts to make the project succeed.

The New Harmony colony, like the early Christian communal system and collective arrangements in the Jamestown and Plymouth settlements, failed to achieve the idealistic goal of economic equality. Its downfall came because of very understandable and predictable reasons: people simply do not put forth their best efforts in communes, and diligent workers soon catch on to the fact that they are supporting free loaders. Even exceptionally capable people could hardly make a permanent success of a collective, but the New Harmonites, John Chamberlain surmises, "must have been the most glorious collection of deadbeats ever assembled together in one place."[4]

An Inherent Weakness

But collectivism doesn't fail simply because of betrayal by deadbeats. It also failed in the early Christian community, a gathering of inspired people lifted up by a powerful spiritual idea. There must have been dissension and dissatisfaction even in this saintly group, for the time came when the apostle Paul had to remind that "if any would not work, neither should he eat."[5] After that, communal living did not seem to survive for long in the Christian church, although it has been resurrected occasionally by small sects, who have eventually abandoned it.[6] The verdict of all these

[3] John Chamberlain, *The Roots of Capitalism* (Princeton, N. J.: D. Van Nostrand, 1959), Chapter VI.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] II Thessalonians, 3:10.

[6] The community living of certain religious orders, such as Trappist monks, has no bearing on this subject, since vows of poverty, obedience, and other disciplines prevent possible causes of dispute.

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experiments in collectivism is that they do not work, even when their organizers move heaven and earth to make them succeed.

Despite everything the record shows, libertarians who point to these ventures as proof that communism goes against human nature are wasting their time in arguments with disciplined communists. *For communists have known this right along, and have never intended to establish a new social order by proving that pilot collectives could be productive.* Karl Marx called such utopian experiments (as the New Harmony fiasco) "castles in the air," and ended his sweeping *Manifesto* by stating: "The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions."[7]

To Karl Marx and his followers, the miners in Bret Harte's story would have been just greedy entrepreneurs trying to become capitalists themselves. It hadn't the slightest resemblance to Marx's concept of collectivism. He advocated, without apology or concealment, a totalitarian doctrine. ◈

[7] Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (Gateway Edition; Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1954), Chapters III and IV.

IDEAS ON LIBERTY

Capitalism

KARL MARX completely rejected the only economic system on earth under which it is possible for the workers themselves to own, to control, and to manage directly the facilities of production. And shocking as the news may be to the disciples of Marx, that system is capitalism!

Here in America, ownership of our biggest and most important industries is sold daily, in little pieces, on the stock market. It is constantly changing hands; and if the workers of this country truly wish to own the tools of production, they can do so very simply.

They do not have to seize the government by force of arms. They do not even have to win an election. All in the world they have to do is to buy, in the open market, the capital stock of the corporation they want to own – just as millions of other Americans have been doing for many decades.

BENJAMIN F. FAIRLESS, *The Great Mistake of Karl Marx*

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Government in the Textile Business

M. R. LEFKOE

OBSERVERS of the economic scene today are confronted by a strange paradox: American businessmen, whom they normally would expect to be fighting *against* government controls, are, in many instances, *actively seeking* additional economic regulations. In fact, these requests are often referred to by government officials in defending their growing stranglehold on American industry. This paradox is easily resolved, however, by examining the motives of those businessmen who request government intervention.

The businessmen fall into two essential categories. The first type are those who cannot – or are afraid to – compete in a free market. These businessmen are unwilling to put their products or services up for sale and let the consumer be the final judge as to which firms will fail and which will succeed. These are the men who shirk responsibility of competing freely and who plead for government assistance and protection from competition. In a free economy they would fail.

These businessmen deserve the totalitarian state that their demands for controls ultimately will lead to. Their cries for help cannot serve as justifications for anything or anybody; they are nothing more than the pleas of men who are unable to survive, freely offering value for value. Thus, they are anxious to employ government force to give them an un-

Mr. Lefkoe, a business executive in Los Angeles, writes a weekly column on political-economic issues for *The Commercial and Financial Chronicle*. This article is reprinted by permission from his column of August 23, 1962.
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fair advantage over their competitors.

The second category of businessmen — by far the majority — request government help for a far different reason. They are willing to offer the consumer their wares in a free market. However, they are forced to operate under the burden of oppressive laws and regulations. In asking for government aid, they are grasping for any form of relief which will enable them to save their businesses from undeserved destruction. In a free economy they would succeed.

These businessmen see no way out of their predicament other than soliciting government assistance. Their motives are honest; nevertheless, they cannot be held completely blameless since their requests for help also will lead necessarily to a fully controlled society. They are justified in seeking relief, but they have made the drastic error of advocating more controls instead of fighting for the repeal of the laws and regulations which are destroying them.

How Government Interferes

The problems faced by executives in the textile industry provide an excellent example of the dilemma faced by these honest but misguided businessmen and explain why many of them feel required to solicit government help.

Essentially, their problem consists of foreign imports which, in many instances, are sold in the United States at prices far below their own costs. If this situation were solely the result of more efficient management on the part of foreign companies, domestic textile manufacturers would have to face the alternative of either lowering their own costs, or going into another business. However, such is not the case.

American textile companies operate at a competitive disadvantage with foreign firms through no fault of their own. Their inability to compete is caused and necessitated by government intervention. That they have been able to survive at all is a tribute to their ingenuity and productive ability.

There are many types of government controls which affect the textile industry indirectly and whose effects are not always readily perceivable. The antitrust laws are an illustration of this type of intervention. These laws deliberately are designed to destroy a company's desire to improve its methods of producing and marketing old products, and kill its initiative to develop new products.

In the case of the textile industry, however, it is not necessary to refer to relatively intangible examples of government inter-

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ference in order to demonstrate the chaos caused by government controls.

Men, Materials, Machines

Textile firms find it all but impossible to compete with foreign manufacturers for several very explicit reasons: higher labor costs, higher raw material costs, and an ever narrowing advantage in the use of more efficient machinery. Let us examine each of these three problems in turn.

One would expect wages to be higher in America than in most foreign countries since our nation has a higher standard of living brought about by a more fully industrialized economy. However, labor unions in the United States have not raised wages through a process of free collective bargaining; they have been aided and abetted by the government in numerous ways. Unions have been given monopoly powers as a result of discriminatory labor laws and, thus, have been able to coerce employers into granting unjustifiable and uneconomic wage increases.

The problem of uneconomically high labor costs was alleviated considerably when almost all of the major textile firms moved from unionized plants in New England to nonunion plants in the South. Nevertheless, at the present time domestic textile companies still have labor costs several hundred per cent higher than their foreign competitors.

The higher raw material costs borne by the American textile industry are a direct result of the grotesque set of laws and regulations commonly known as America's "farm program." The chain of events is as follows:

Through a system of allotments and price supports, the government increases the domestic price for cotton by purchasing cotton at a price several cents above that which would have resulted on a free market. This procedure results in the accumulation of large government holdings of cotton. Then, in an attempt to reduce its large surplus, the government sells the cotton to exporters at a price lower than its own cost. By selling at a loss, the government enables exporters to resell the cotton in world markets – the international price being lower than the government-inflated domestic price.

Thus, foreign textile firms are able to purchase cotton in world markets at a price below that which American firms are forced to pay. In effect, the foreign companies are subsidized by the United States government. This program of insanity reaches its height when one realizes that the

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money used by the government to reduce the raw material costs of foreign textile companies comes from the taxes paid by the American firms with which they compete.

Robbing Peter To Pay Paul

There was a time when American firms were able to offset a great deal of their higher labor costs and raw material costs through the use of more modern and efficient machinery. This advantage also has been systematically destroyed by the government.

The procedure employed has been twofold: The government first increased taxes on the profits of American firms, thus preventing them from accumulating the capital needed to purchase new machinery. Then, it sent the tax money it collected to foreign countries so that they could subsidize their own businessmen and help them set up modern manufacturing facilities. The result of this "enlightened" foreign policy is a situation whereby foreign companies have accumulated machinery which is equal to, and in many cases better than, the machinery used in the United States.

That some form of action is required by American textile executives is obvious. However, for them to believe that higher tariffs and import quotas will solve their dilemma is worse than folly – it is tantamount to requesting another dose of the poison which caused the original illness. Because it is the government which has created their problems through regulations and controls, businessmen in the textile industry – and every other industry – must fight to keep the government out of economic affairs.

The job will be more difficult. It unquestionably is harder to effect the repeal of hundreds of old laws than it is to get one new law passed. But this is not the real alternative businessmen face. They never will be able to extricate themselves from the disasters resulting from government controls if they continue to request more government controls.

There is only one fundamental alternative: A society governed by the principle of *laissez faire*, in which businessmen are free to create wealth and an ever-growing standard of living – or a totalitarian dictatorship, where in place of businessmen there only exist helpless slaves struggling to keep themselves and their masters alive. ◈

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JESS RALEY

A Man Named Frank

THE ARTICLE, "I Like Butter," in the June 1962 FREEMAN has brought letters from people in all sections of these United States. You may recall my protest against a governmental program that is taxing me out of the market for my favorite spread while making "surplus" butter available in profusion to welfare beneficiaries.

The reader response was most gratifying and, I confess, a bit surprising in that few of the letters were critical. Experience had led me to believe that readers seldom would write to an author unless they were vigorously opposed to the proposition in question.

The few critical letters I received are explanations of the farm program and why such a program is necessary. In these letters need, real or imagined, is assumed to justify. If this were true, a man who needed money or goods would be justified in taking them from a neighbor. As a matter of fact, this actually happens, indirectly, when our earnings are taken by taxation and given to another.

There was also a letter, along with a pound of their product, from the producers of a well-known substitute spread. They believe their product is tops in its field, better, more uniform than the genuine article, and the price is less than half. They have absolutely no apology to offer for their product or for the position processors of the genuine article have been forced into.

This is, of course, a commendable American attitude with which I have absolutely no quarrel. If they can make and sell it for five cents a pound, I'm all for it; but personally, I still like butter.

Most of the letters were from people who had experienced a kindred frustration. The well-grounded statements and provocative questions would seem to herald an awakening among the citizenry. But one letter in particular kept haunting me.

Mr. Raley is a free-lance author, speaker, philosopher from Gadsden, Alabama.

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This letter, from a college student, informed me that there were many individual farmers who had never accepted charity or participated in the farm program in any way. The student's grandfather was such a man and I was invited to "drop by and see, any time."

The grandfather, whom I will call Frank Roe, lives on a farm in the Appalachians. I promised not to use his real name or give the location of his farm. Mr. Roe feels that he has broken no law, but he is a cautious man. As a matter of fact, I would have failed to get his story had I not known the small farmer of pre-farm-program days.

The opportunity to meet a free man is not an everyday occurrence, so the first weekend I could spare saw me headed for the hills.

As I drove deeper into the foothills, familiar sights and scents invoked a wave of nostalgia, for this was the same chain of hills I had lived in for two years in the early thirties. Entering alone, penniless and uncertain, I had emerged two years later with enough money to return to school. In those two years I learned how to find a bee tree, cut it, and sell the honey; catch wild animals, skin them, and sell their hides; dig and market medicinal roots; and many other ways to make a buck. More than this, I had learned that there was a way to accomplish that which appears to be impossible. At the same time, I learned to respect the so-called "hillbilly" farmer. He was, beyond any doubt, a member of the last group to surrender their individual liberty to the state. Actually, I now detest the farm program more for what it did to this breed than for its cost in dollars.

The back-country farmer, as I knew him, was not far removed from his eighteenth century ancestors who insisted that a man had the right to make and sell spirits from his own grain. For the most part he had little money, but in the fall when crops were in he was filled with compassion for anyone, rich or poor, who didn't have a crib of corn, meat to go through the year, potatoes, turnips, molasses, and the like. He might have lacked formal education, but his philosophy of life was a vibrant living thing, and he knew innumerable ways to earn an honest penny. He was not well-informed – generally dogmatic in his opinions. But he was a rugged individualist who wore no man's collar.

The Man, and His Story

Frank Roe, at seventy-eight, was slightly stooped with large, rough hands and deep lines around mild gray eyes. He didn't look im-

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pressive, but he was the genuine article. Three trips were required to obtain his story, but for the sake of brevity, I pass it on to you en masse:

"When all this started, way back in the thirties, I didn't think about it catching on like it did. All the same, it didn't seem right to me and I would have no part of it.

"You see, young feller, I had been a free man for so long I was right sot in my ways. Yes, sir, I remember like it was yesterday, the day I was twenty-one. Pa give me four hundred dollars in gold and a sorrel hoss with flax mane and tail. Then he sot me free. I reckon I wasted most of the money and the hoss died of colic before green up, but I have been my own man ever since. Guess I'll die that way.

"No, it ain't been easy. I didn't think much about it at first, but when the government kept sending people around to pry into my business, I seen they were bound and compelled to take over everything they could. After that I quit talking to them. I just paid my taxes, stood ready to fight for my country any time I was needed, and let them do their darndest to trap me.

"You see, young feller, before all this started I had thought of the government and the nation as one and the same. Pretty soon I had to change my mind about this. I still think as much of my country as I ever did, but nobody or government or anything else is about to make me go back on my raising. You see, Ma and Pa taught all us kids right from wrong.

"Well, I had to quit raising cotton because they wouldn't let me sell it, wouldn't even let the ginner gin it for that matter. Later on I sold most of my milk cows because they wanted me to sign up to sell milk. I hear tell that in some parts a man can't even raise grain for his own use. It ain't hardly that bad here. They do come around, wanting me to sign up how much corn I will plant, but nobody has tried to keep me from raising enough for my own use.

"It was pretty rough going for a year or two after I had to quit raising cotton. It was, for a fact. After a while, though, I hit on the idea of raising chickens. I started out with a hundred at a time. The market was good and the government didn't bother me, so I kept getting more chicks and better feed.

"At first I sold my broilers on foot, but more people took to raising chickens. Someone built a processing plant and the price kept coming down. After a few

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years, the co-ops got into the picture; they had their own hatcheries, feed mills, and processing plants. The price went so low a man couldn't afford to take a chance on raising broilers for himself. I fed out a few batches, at so much a head, for the co-op since I had space and equipment for twenty thousand at a time, but I didn't like it and switched to turkeys. Later on I found out that the co-ops were operating on government money, and after that I was mighty glad I had quit them.

"Yes, sir, young feller, it's been pretty rough at times, but it's been worth it. I kept my self-respect and the government kept their handouts for the man as wants them. What t'other feller does is no concern of mine, but I'll tell you one thing: I'm not the only man in these parts who still runs his own home.

"You know, I've been thinking about that piece you wrote about not being able to buy butter. Mae's boy read it to me when he was down here last summer. What you say makes a lot of sense, but did you ever stop to think how much cheaper broilers are now than they were twenty or thirty years ago? Yes, sir, I sold broilers for fifty cents each when a man couldn't find a day's work for a dollar. So many people got into the business, we all had to build better and bigger houses and buy better equipment to stay in the game. Even before the co-ops took over, broilers were the best buy on the market. Now it seems to me that the reason chickens came down and butter went up was because the government was messing with butter while chickens were left to their natural course.

"Now, if you just must go, young feller, I want you to take a bucket of these molasses and try them for me. It seems to me they are a mite thin. I took the liberty of having one of the boys put a few punkins, turnips, and such in the back of your car, and the woman wants you to take a little tad of new corn meal to your wife. It just has a better taste when its fresh-ground. Don't forget to come back and bird hunt some with me when the season opens. And I want you to try one of my turkeys for Thanksgiving, just to see what you think about them." ◈

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POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Is Labor a Commodity?

POSITIONS WANTED

PAUL L. POIROT

THROUGHOUT MOST of recorded world history, and even today in some of the more primitive societies, human beings have been and are treated as animals fit only to serve as slaves under the lash of a master.

No civilized person wishes to condone such savagery. A person is not a commodity; each individual is priceless – his worth not to be measured or expressed in dollars, or gold, or things. The laborer as such is not a chattel to be sold and bought, owned and controlled by others. Yet, one frequently hears serious debate as to whether labor is a commodity – whether the services a laborer renders should be priced in market fashion according to the forces of supply and demand.

Apparently, many persons still believe in the old "iron law of wages" propounded in error by some of the earlier economists. It seemed to them, at the dawn of the industrial revolution, that wages in general could never rise above that bare level at which wage earners could subsist and reproduce their kind. On the basis of that fallacy, Karl Marx advocated political revolution and compulsory communism as the only chance for workers to receive "the full produce of their labor."

Marx was intelligent enough to recognize that human labor is a scarce factor of production, but he could not or would not see that labor is only one of the costs of production. He seemed to take for granted that somehow someone would accumulate savings and make them available in the form of tools and other capital for use by workers, whether or not a return were allowed on such investment. Nor would Marx recognize that what attracted workers into the factory system was the opportunity they found there to improve their level of living – an opportun-

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ity for progress by their own free will and choice. All he could see was that poverty still existed at the middle of the nineteenth century – and he urged revolution.

A Vital Error

In reality, though, a free market was, and is, the only escape of workers from feudal poverty and serfdom, their only opportunity for progress. Yet Marx and his followers, by confiscating private property, would destroy the market mechanism for price determination and voluntary exchange, and with it all hope for relief of poverty.

It is the free market and competition among employers for the services of wage earners that make workers independent of arbitrary discretion on the part of the employer. Within broad limits set by what consumers are willing to pay for finished products, a wage earner is free to shop around for the job opportunity of his choice. "What makes the worker a free man is precisely the fact that the employer, under the pressure of the market's price structure, considers labor a commodity, an instrument of earning profits. . . . Labor is appraised like a commodity not because the entrepreneurs and capitalists are hardhearted and callous, but because they are unconditionally subject to the supremacy of the pitiless consumers."[1]

It is the prospect of profit from employing laborers of given skills that drives businessmen to compete and bid wage rates up to the limit consumers will allow. If present entrepreneurs ignore such profit opportunities, then others will enter the business – perhaps some of the wage earners themselves. To say that labor is a commodity in this situation simply means that the individual wage earner is free to shop around and sell his services to the highest bidder – or free to be self-employed or unemployed if no bid suits him.

Each Is Worth What He Can Earn

In this connection, it should be clear that the worth of every man's service is similarly determined, whether he be a strictly unskilled laborer or the most highly skilled artist, teacher, minister, butcher, baker, lawyer, engineer, business executive, or whatever. If he offers a service for sale, its value depends upon the highest bid acceptable to him in the free market.

The seller of services, of course, is not free to compel consumers to pay prices high enough to cover

[1] Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1949), pp. 605-629.

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every conceivable wage demand. But, short of government compulsion in such forms as minimum wage laws, unemployment compensation, and the like, no one has such power over consumers.

So, the wage earner's alternatives are to sell his services at market rates, as other scarce factors of production are priced in a market economy, or to work under the decree of a dictator of one kind or another.

The wage earner himself is no more a commodity than is the farmer whose labor results in a bag of potatoes. But the farmer should be free to sell either his labor or his potatoes; and so should every wage earner be free to offer his services as a commodity. Laborers or others who argue that labor is not a commodity would thus deny freedom of exchange, which is the economic method – and the only one – that assures the laborer true and full value for his services. ◈

IDEAS ON LIBERTY

Protective Taxes and Wages

IT IS SAID that we cannot compete with those who pay less wages than we. There are two classes of persons with whom one cannot compete, – his inferiors and his superiors. A physician might find that he could not compete with a laborer in digging a ditch, or with a great financier in managing a bank. Could any tax enable him to compete with the banker; that is, to compete with his superior? On the contrary, if he should complain that he could not compete with the laborer because he could not afford to employ his time in an occupation which is less remunerative than his own, everyone would ask him why then he desired to compete? Now, could a tax enable him to compete with the laborer? Indeed, it could. It could intervene to deprive him of the services of the laborer, and force him to dig his own ditch, abandoning a profession in which he could earn ten dollars a day to spend his time in an occupation worth only a dollar. This last is the only way in which protective taxes enable us to compete. They put us in a position such that we abandon occupations in which we might earn the high American rates, in order to do things which other people would do for us at half the price.

WILLIAM GRAHAM SUMNER
From an essay in the *North American Review*, January 1883.

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RIFT on the RIGHT

NOT SO MANY years ago Frank Chodorov took note of a potentially dangerous rift among the forces of the intellectual Right. The libertarians, fighting for the protection of the individual, continued to direct their fire against the "liberal" apostles of the omnicompetent state. But the so-called New Conservatives, though they deplored the wholly materialist conception of personality that is at the heart of modern "liberal" collectivism, talked as if "individualism" were a dirty word. The New Conservatives supported the superior claims of a nebulously defined "community" without bothering to distinguish in their discourse between such categories as "society" and "government." Meanwhile, as libertarians and "communitarians" bickered, the dominant forces of the collectivist Left went their merry power-gathering way.

Mr. Chodorov rightly deplored the battle on the Right over "individualism" as a misguided thing. Nevertheless, the struggle has gone on – and while Russell Kirk, for example, attacks a number of people, from Ayn Rand to Ludwig Von Mises, for ignoring the idea of "community," the American State continues to pass laws which are inimical to everything which Mr. Kirk loves. The Deweyites, speaking for the "community" of educators, debase the textbooks; the supporters of compulsory social security, in charge of a "community" approach to old-age "insurance," make a mockery of private saving and family prudence, and so forth and so on.

The deeply debilitating – and unnecessary – civil war on the intellectual Right is the subject of Frank S. Meyer's brilliantly searching *In Defense of Freedom: A Conservative Credo* (Regnery, $3.95). Like Mr. Chodorov, Mr. Meyer wishes to see the New Conservatives and the old-fashioned Liberals – or libertarians – forget

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their disputes over "individualism" at least until their common enemy has been routed.

Burke Had Much To Conserve

The New Conservatives, in their defense of the idea of "community," take off from Edmund Burke. Inasmuch as Burke's thought had its submerged "natural rights" strain, Mr. Meyer is not disposed to think of Burke as a devil. But he questions the relevance of Burke to the problems of the present moment. In his fulminations against the French Revolution, Burke spoke for the claims of continuity: every newborn English child, so Burke insisted, had a right to the traditions and the freedoms stemming from a praiseworthy ancestral order. As Kipling was to phrase it at a later date: "All we have of freedom, all we use and know, this our fathers bought for us, long and long ago." But 1963, says Mr. Meyer, is not 1793. The truth is that two generations of the "liberal" collectivist ascendancy have obliterated most of the philosophical landmarks that Burke would have respected. In urging a defense of the traditional "community," the New Conservatives are simply arguing for a defense of something no longer there.

The New Conservatives love virtue. But virtue, as Mr. Meyer sees it, has oozed out of the modern "community." And the government that poses as the political agent of that community, far from defending the individual in the rights that are covered by the nay-saying of the Ten Commandments ("Thou shalt not steal," "Thou shalt not covet," etc.), is itself busy stealing energies from the many to bestow largesse on favored groups ("labor," "the farmer," "the impacted area," and all the rest of the rigmarole).

To restore a community that might have the respect of both the libertarians and the New Conservatives, Mr. Meyer argues that a distinction must be made between the ends of politics and the ends of life. The New Conservatives, he admits, are quite correct when they speak of virtue as the supreme end of life. But the end of politics is the protection of the individual in his natural rights, which include the right to choose between good and evil courses, subject to penalties for invading the rights of others. The state has fulfilled its function when it jails one man for stealing from another or for assaulting another man's person. When the state arrogates to itself the right to compel a man to behave virtuously (as it does when it tells a man how he should work or save, or what his tastes in liquor or architecture should

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be), it creates the conditions for tyranny. Men, being fallible, cannot be trusted with unlimited power over their fellow men; they must be held to a minimal conception of political control. Otherwise they will, being human, try to coerce men to a General Will which is often a euphemism for the politician's own personal power drive.

Relationships Have No Rights

Mr. Meyer is not always clear in his distinctions between "society" and "community," or between "community" and "the state." But it is obvious that he does not regard the terms as interchangeable. The Greeks, he says, made a mistake when they identified the "polis" with the whole social area inhabited by civilized man. A "community" that is an overlapping collection of voluntary associations (the church, the lodge, the married couple, the university, the business corporation) is not co-extensive with the state save in periods of totalitarian corruption. As for "society," it is an abstract of the sum of the relationships between individuals. To say that a "society" has rights is simply to say that "relationships" have rights – which is silly. It is the individuals who have the rights, including the right to enter into the relationships that create society. The individual will, of course, incorporate traditions in his person – and in respecting an individual's rights other people will not do violence to his ancestral pieties. Thus, there is room for Burke's view of the claims of continuity in any rational discussion of the claims of "the person as the central and primary end of political society."

If Mr. Meyer is not wholly satisfactory in differentiating between such concepts as "society," "community," and "the state," he is entirely sound in his rejection of the idea that the "polis" or the "community" can be likened to a physical organism. To say that "society" is "organic" is to say that human beings are nothing more than cells in a body. This is pushing an analogy to the point of fantasy. Can a cell have free will, or even a conditional area of freedom? Can an organism composed of cells give rise to quarreling philosophies or to different political parties? To function as an organism, a society would have to imitate the life of an anthill or a beehive. But the genes of human beings, which combine in thousands of ways to produce an almost infinite variation, are obviously different from those of ants and bees. The organic conception of society, then, if pushed to logical conclusions, results in social

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orders which end in either atrophy or explosion.

Diversions from the Main Event

This being true, Mr. Meyer is quite right in urging the New Conservatives to make common cause with the libertarians in presenting a front against "contemporary collectivist liberalism." The collectivist intellectual arrogantly assumes that he is uniquely constituted to function as the directing brain of the social "organism"; the other elements of the population, not being part of the "elite" cells in the community, must take orders. The Edmund Burke who followed Adam Smith in his admiration for a subtle and constantly proliferating division of labor could never have pushed his theory of organic development to the point of thinking about society as a collection of cells coordinated by a few "planners." Burke, after all, was an individualist, too, as his famous speech on conciliating the Americans makes plain.

Mr. Meyer rests his case against the shortsightedness of the New Conservatives on his own rigorous and felicitously phrased logic. But he might also have appealed to the history of the nineteenth century. At the height of the Victorian era Carlyle and Ruskin, thinking to defend "community" by pressing the organic, or biological, analogy, fell hard upon the "Benthamism" of the rising industrial order. They looked to the creation of a new "organic" feudalism. Ruskin even arrived at the point of advocating that no one be allowed to marry without state permission. The new feudalism sponsored by Carlyle and Ruskin turned out, in the next generation, to be Tory socialism. Well, is that what the New Conservatives want? The last time I heard Russell Kirk on the subject of modern Britain, he was full of anger about council houses and other monstrosities of "planning." But when individuals aren't consulted about their own individual tastes, doesn't a "community" inevitably build council houses? This is a thought for the day. ◈

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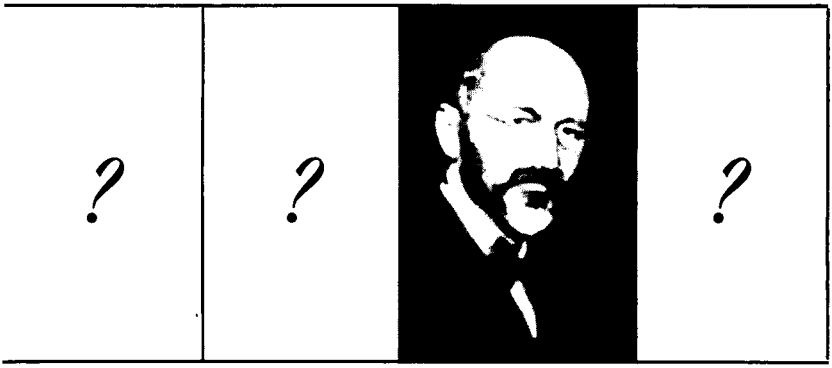

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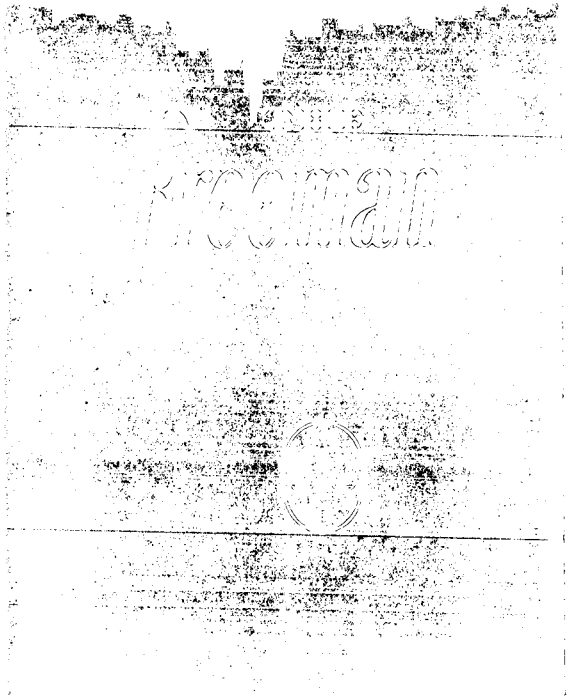

TO EACH, HIS OWN

My faith in the proposition that each man should do precisely as he pleases with all which is exclusively his own lies at the foundation of the sense of justice there is in me. I extend the principle to communities of men as well as to individuals. I so extend it because it is politically wise, as well as naturally just: politically wise in saving us from broils about matters which do not concern us.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN
Speech at Peoria, Ill., Oct. 16, 1854

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